

LutheranWoman

January/February 2011

\$2.50

TODAY



PROCESSED

DEC 14 2010

CTU LIBRARY

**Speaking Out
Breaking the Rules**

**Scotch Tape & Baling Wire
Meaning-Full Worship**



PRAYING FOR OTHERS. RAISING GREAT KIDS. GROWING IN FAITH. LAUGHING OFTEN. AFFIRMING OUR GIFTS. STUDYING THE WORD WITH FRIENDS. SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER IN OUR CALLINGS. SHARING A MEAL WITH AN ELDER. ENGAGING IN MINISTRY AND ACTION. TAKING A WALK. PROMOTING HEALING AND WHOLENESS. CALLING ELECTED OFFICIALS. ADVOCATING FOR THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY. PRACTICING HOSPITALITY. READING LWT. SMILING EVERYDAY. GIVING THANKS. PRAYING FOR OTHERS. RAISING GREAT KIDS. GROWING IN FAITH. LAUGHING OFTEN. AFFIRMING OUR GIFTS. STUDYING THE WORD WITH FRIENDS. SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER IN OUR CALLINGS. SHARING A MEAL WITH AN ELDER. ENGAGING IN MINISTRY AND ACTION. TAKING A WALK. PROMOTING

THIS IS WHAT BOLD LOOKS LIKE



**Celebrate Bold Women's Day
February 27, 2011**

For celebration ideas, go to
www.womenoftheelca.org or
call 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2730

BOLD WOMEN'S DAY





22



26



36

Editor Kate Sprutta Elliott
 Managing Editor Terri Lackey
 Editor, Café Elizabeth McBride

Art Direction On Track Marketing
 Cover Bartosz Hadyniak
www.lutheranwomantoday.org

IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 1 JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011

Worship is at the center of our life in the faith. It moves us and strengthens us to live out our calling as disciples of Christ.

- 6 **A Tale of Two Women** When you buy Fair Trade coffee, you help change lives. *Kattie Somerfeld*
- 12 **Speaking Out** Sister Lutheran Leymah Gbowee advocates for peace in Liberia and for women's rights everywhere. *Jodi Deike*
- 16 **Cultural Iceberg** We don't always realize how our culture affects us. *Sunita Mortha*
- 22 **Scotch Tape and Baling Wire** Holy Communion stitches us together, connecting and uniting us. *Nora Gallagher*
- 26 **Breaking the Rules** Our unspoken rules often prevent us from accepting others. *Gladys G. Moore*
- 36 **Meaning-full Worship** From the mountaintop experience to the quiet comfort of our own congregation, worship inspires us. *Susan Greeley*

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 **Voices** **In Spirit and Truth** *Kate Sprutta Elliott*
- 5 **Give Us This Day** **A Love Supreme** *Violet Cucciniello Little*
- 10 **Family Matters** **Ears to Listen** *Sue Gamelin*
- 15 **Let Us Pray** **Welcome to Worship!** *Julie K. Ageson*
- 20 **Health Wise** **The Truth About Your Thyroid** *Molly M. Ginty*
- 30 **Bible Study** **Session 5 Worship**
 The People of God: Worship, which unites us with God, can divide us as God's people.
 Unity in the Midst of Diversity
- 40 **Session 6 Race and Culture**
 Reaching across racial and cultural lines to share the gospel is what Christians are called to do. *Jensen and Linda Johnson Seyenkulo*
- 49 **Grace Notes** **Whole Lot of Bold** *Linda Post Bushkofsky*
- 50 **Amen!** **A Wide-open Embrace** *Catherine Malotky*

PLUS ...

- 19 **Anti-Racism Education** Today's Dream: Tomorrow's Reality network helps Women of the ELCA *Inez Torres Davis*
- 46 **Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust** Another in a series of articles that explore the ELCA Social Statements *Roger A. Willer*
- 51 **Directory of Reader Services** Subscription, editorial, and advertising information

www.lutheranwomantoday.org



VOICES

In Spirit and Truth

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

In this issue, we have two Bible study sessions—one that discusses worship and one that deals with race and culture. Either topic can lead to discomfort or disagreement, but our Bible study authors remind us that, “God’s wonderful diversity is a gift to God’s people. That diversity enriches the church and shows us a wider reality of the image of God.”

Diversity is a gift, yes, but sometimes our own internal, unspoken rules prevent us from accepting that gift—and hinder our witness to God’s abundant love. In “Breaking the Rules,” Gladys Moore writes, “Whether it’s noisy children, people of a different race or ethnicity... or the guests from the congregation’s mid-day meal ministry who don’t smell like lilacs and roses, sometimes our hidden rules and norms prevent us from being the mission-minded servants God expects us to be.”

Some of these rules come to us from the culture in which we were raised or in which we are now immersed. Often, we don’t realize how our culture affects us. In “Cultural Iceberg,” Sunitha Mortha challenges readers to consider what shapes our worldview, “We share basic questions: What is the meaning of life? How do we feed ourselves? How shall we raise our children? How shall we love and marry? The cultural solutions to these shared questions become a kind of lens through which we see the world.”

No matter how different we may be, we are bound to one another in baptism and are now members of the same fam-

ily, the household of faith. This is most evident in worship, especially in Holy Communion. In an excerpt from Nora Gallagher’s book, *The Sacred Meal*, we see how we are connected and united by the bread and wine: “Holy Communion was a web, a web of people who were being stitched together. And tomorrow, we would need to be stitched together again. Over and over.”

That stitching happens in many different kinds of worship. In “Meaning-Full Worship,” Susan Greeley tells of the time she worshiped in a congregation in Bratislava, Slovakia: “The pastor began the Eucharist and I was enfolded in a ritual so profound that it needed no words.... I understood nothing of the language, but everything of the meaning.”

After the chalice, we often connect with and encourage each other over the cup—of coffee or tea. Lutherans have long formed and sustained deep friendships over a cup of brew. In “A Tale of Two Women,” Kattie Somerfeld describes how we connect with women across the world over coffee—when we buy Fair Trade products. The two women in the tale are on a path to a better life through the efforts of Lutheran World Relief and its partner, the Gumutindo coffee cooperative.

At fellowship next Sunday, try to say “hello” to someone you usually don’t talk to, someone who seems very different from you. Maybe over a cup of coffee, you’ll find you have more in common than you thought. ☘

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*. You may write to her at LWT@elca.org.



GIVE US THIS DAY

A Love Supreme

by Violet Cucciniello Little

When I was visiting

San Francisco, I learned of a church called the Church of St. John Coltrane, named after the great jazz musician. Coltrane lived a good part of his life in Philadelphia where I am pastor of The Welcome Church, a street church ministry mainly serving people experiencing homelessness. I never made it to St. John Coltrane, but I decided that my first service back home would include Coltrane's signature piece, "A Love Supreme."

Coltrane, like a number of my parishioners, struggled with addiction and questions of self worth. He wrote "A Love Supreme" as a reflection of his faith in the God who loved him without condition. I shared this with my congregation as we listened to the song together on the Feast of All Saints.

We talked about being made new and tears wiped away, words read that day from Isaiah and Revelation. By request, we read these texts three times. We shared stories of hope and sadness. One person spoke of how several friends died in his arms from drugs or gunshot wounds. Another said he was hanging on to the promises he had just heard.

But on this Feast of All Saints, it was in the breaking of the bread that I most fully experienced this Love Supreme. Just before the service, Erik, a young man in his 30s, offered to assist in serving communion. I had known Erik for two years and his story was not an easy one to hear: abandoned at birth, moved from home to home, introduced to alcohol at 11 by a foster grandparent and

then drugs shortly after. Erik longed to be loved and tried to ease his ongoing pain with drugs and alcohol until one day, drugged and drunk, he did the unspeakable and sexually assaulted a young child. Admitting his guilt, Erik was incarcerated for five years, with two years' parole.

I met Erik when he first came to Philadelphia, homeless and in violation of his parole. He was filthy, smelly, and hungry. As trust was built and relationships formed, we helped Erik get into a shelter. Eventually, he found the courage to go to the authorities and get ongoing help and counseling.

But back to this Feast of All Saints. Standing in front of the altar with my hands open after I had offered everyone communion, I turned to Erik. Taking the bread, he placed it in my palms and said, "The body of Christ..." The body of Christ placed in my palms by this man who had hurt a child.

I looked at him and said, "Amen..."

Then Sheila, spontaneously rising from her seat, took the cup and offered it to me saying, "The blood of Christ, shed for you..." Again, I replied, "Amen."

There I stood in the middle of Sheila and Erik. Erik, who had sexually assaulted a child, and Sheila, who had known the horrors of being raped at age 11. The three of us, held together by this Love Supreme. 🌿

The Rev. Violet Cucciniello Little serves as the pastor of The Welcome Church in Philadelphia. You can read her blog at www.thewelcomechurch.blogspot.com.

A TALE OF

TWO WOMEN



It's 5 a.m. and the sun hasn't yet peeked over the top of Mt. Elgon in Uganda. Bira Nagwere (above left) has been up for some time, milking cows and goats and collecting eggs to sell at the local market. Next she'll awaken her grandchildren, dress them, and send them off to school before heading out to her fields to tend her coffee trees.

While Bira is preparing for a day of tending coffee, Lydia Nabulumbi (above right) is preparing for a day of tasting it. As a coffee cupper, it is Lydia's job to make sure the coffee that the Gumutindo Coffee Cooperative sells is the best possible quality.

These two women hold very different functions within the coffee cooperative—Bira knows coffee from the ground, Lydia from the cup—but both of their stories illustrate the powerful

changes in women's lives as a result of Lutheran World Relief's investment in small-scale farmers.

A WOMAN'S WORK

Like most women who live on Mt. Elgon, Bira is responsible for caring and providing for her family. It's her job to tend the coffee trees, grow crops, and perform a variety

of other functions that keep her family and home going.

While women in Uganda do most of the work on coffee farms, they rarely own their land. More often, their husbands do. And even though they aren't always present, the husbands can demand money at any time and their wives must give it, leaving them with little to support the family.

According to Bira Nagwere, this is the way it has always been.

"Everybody knows that the women will stay and be responsible for the children and endure the hardships," she explains.

For many years, Bira struggled to grow coffee, and what she did grow was poor quality and didn't sell for much. She belonged to Gumutindo, a cooperative made up of 5,074 coffee farmers, and the other



farmers weren't faring much better. International buyers wanted to buy from them, but the quality of their beans didn't meet the minimum standards.

Lutheran World Relief began working with Gumutindo in 2008 with two goals—to strengthen Gumutindo as an organization and to help farmers improve the way they grow and process coffee.

As a part of the project, LWR helps farmers learn how to properly care for and replace their trees, use manure as fertilizer and then process their beans to preserve their quality. LWR also helped Gumutindo build a warehouse to store beans properly and purchase equipment to process them.

Just two years later, the farmers' hard work is paying off. Things have changed drastically for the members of Gumutindo.

Gumutindo now performs many quality control checks. For instance, before farmers can sell their coffee, it first goes through multiple quality checks to make sure the beans have properly dried and that most defects are removed.

Bira, who once struggled to grow any beans at all, has seen her yield increase by 30 percent. And the investment in better growing, processing, and storage methods improved the quality of her beans, so they sell for a higher price. Best of all, Bira can finally realize

the dream of helping her children. Now, she can even help send her grandchildren to school.

As a result of that dream fulfilled for Bira and for many other women farmers, a new generation of Ugandan women is emerging—strong, savvy, confident women determined to pay returns on the investments their mothers and grandmothers have made in their futures.

GOOD QUALITIES

While Bira works hard to grow quality beans, Lydia works equally hard as a cupper to maintain that quality.

A cupper takes samplings of the farmers' coffee, brews it and taste-tests it for quality and consistency. Cupping is one of Gumutindo's final quality control checks and is performed by well-trained, highly specialized staff.

Raised on a coffee farm herself, Lydia knows the struggles of coffee farmers. That's part of what drives her work, knowing she has the opportunity to enhance coffee quality and also help farmers improve their crops even more.

"Farmers don't have access to information that affects them; all they see is the price," she says. In her role, Lydia can share feed-

back from buyers that helps farmers improve the coffee and sell it for a better price.

She is also proud to be a role model to other young women throughout the cooperative. Lydia is Gumutindo's first female cupper.

Lydia didn't set out to be a cupper. In fact, she started as a sorter, inspecting beans and removing defects. When a Gumutindo staff member took maternity leave, Lydia was happy to fill in. It was during this assignment that she caught the eye of Gumutindo's CEO Willington Wamayeye.

"Lydia was one of the few people I could trust to be direct and honest with me," says Wamayeye. "She showed a lot of confidence and was a good worker."

When her temporary position was over, Wamayeye promoted her to sorting supervisor. But Lydia was a young woman in a position of authority and got little respect. After two years, she was frustrated and decided to quit the job.

Not wanting to lose such a good worker, Wamayeye decided to train Lydia to be a cupper. Gumutindo paid for Lydia to attend training held by the Ugandan Development Authority. Shortly after, Twin Trading, another of Gumutindo's buyers, hosted Lydia for even more training



in London. Through her career and commitment to Gumutindo, Lydia has shown women in her community a new set of possibilities.

As the mother of a young daughter, Lydia hopes her success inspires more women to work hard and build better lives for themselves.

But many of those advancements remain at risk. Because women do not own their land and have few rights, their progress could be taken away at any time. To truly improve their lives, women need a way to become more financially independent.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

The time between harvest and the next planting is called the off-season—or sometimes the lean season. During this time farmers and their families are most in danger of going hungry. Food supplies are low and money is always tight.

Coffee farmers often keep all their money in their house. Besides leaving them vulnerable to theft, this makes managing household expenses during the off-season difficult. For women, it is even harder because they never know if their husbands will let them keep enough money for daily living.

To help farmers cope, LWR and Gumutindo set up Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs) that work much like American credit unions.

A farmer joins the SACCO by buying a share as an investment. This gives them the ability to save money in their own accounts. Once the SACCO is fully capitalized it can extend loans and pay members dividends.

But for women like Bira, saving money is tricky. What if her husband found out? He could take that money too. Many women were dubious about joining the SACCO.

To help them feel more confident, LWR and Gumutindo hired women to staff the SACCOs. All account information is private and only account holders can access their money. Having female staff in the SACCO makes women feel confident that these rules will be enforced.

Now women are not only account holders at the SACCOs, they also help govern them. Women hold seats on the boards of SACCOs, making sure they continue to serve all farmers. And for Bira, the SACCO has been a particular godsend. She saves the money she makes selling crops at

the local market, along with some of her coffee earnings, and uses that to support her family year round.

CONNECTED COFFEE

While women like Bira and Lydia still face many struggles, both women feel better equipped to handle them now. “I have goals,” says Lydia. “And I know that if I want to do something, I cannot let anyone hold me back.”

Gumutindo has turned a new corner as well. Their coffee quality improved so much that Equal Exchange, LWR’s partner in the LWR Coffee Project, is now featuring Gumutindo’s beans in a new coffee for Lutherans.

Organic Gumutindo is one of four new offerings from the LWR Coffee Project. This rich, bold coffee pays homage to all 5,074 farmers of Gumutindo, and especially to women like Bira and Lydia, whose stories serve as inspiration for women everywhere.

You can be a part of that story by purchasing Organic Gumutindo blend at www.lwrcoffee.com. Whether you drink it black or with cream, hot or iced, at fellowship hour or in your own home, when you enjoy a delicious cup of Organic Gumutindo, your coffee cup becomes a path to a better life for women like Bira and Lydia. ☸
Kattie Somerfeld is LWR’s Fair Trade projects coordinator.





COFFEE *with a* Lutheran Flavor

The LWR Coffee Project unites you with the farmers who labor to fill your cup. Buy Fair Trade to give coffee farmers steady income to send their children to school, make sure their communities have clean water and protect their environment.



FAIRLY TRADED COFFEE

Heremala
Ronmedo
Quisana

coffee farmer
from CEPICAFE
Co-operative,
Peru

lwrcoffee.com | 774.776.7340

The LWR Coffee Project is a partnership between
Lutheran World Relief and Equal Exchange



700 LIGHT STREET, BALTIMORE, MD 21230 800.597.5972 LWR.ORG



FAMILY MATTERS

Ears to Listen

by Sue Gamelin

With a new 2-year-old grandchild in my lap, I sat at the table in our humble guest house in Uganda—and listened. After idly talking about this and that as we waited to leave on our next errand, a poignant conversation began to emerge.

I can't remember what led up to it, but our son Tony began to explain to his daughter, Brittany, age 15, why his grandpa is a role model for him. Grandpa Gamelin lives across the country from this great-granddaughter. She remembers meeting him a few times, but she doesn't really know him. So Tony told Brittany about her great-grandpa's distinguished career as an educator and his history as a generous supporter of the church and other important causes. Tony said he admires this grandpa all the more now as he watches the way in which he takes care of Grandma Gamelin. Both are in their 90s.

Then Tony leaned closer to Brittany to say this: "The thing that I like about Grandpa Gamelin the most is how he listens. When he asks me about my life, he listens when I answer. He makes me feel as if I am the only person in his world. You know how some people you're talking to are just waiting for their turn to talk?" Brittany and I both nodded, and I thought how that was all too true of me. "Well, that's not the way with Grandpa," Tony went on. "He really listens. He asks great questions, lets me know that he wants to hear about my experiences and my viewpoint, and offers wise insights. When we finish talking, I know

that I am understood and valued, even if we don't always agree. What a role model he is for me."

Indeed, what a role model he is for all of us, as we struggle to listen to one another about important issues, and not just shout over each other's heads.

I love it when Jesus declares to his disciples, "Let anyone with ears [to hear] listen" (Matthew 13:43). He says that when he's just told them life-changing things about God's will and wisdom. Sometimes it seems that the disciples respond by getting up, dusting themselves off, and continuing on their way, as if Jesus were only the Channel 12 weatherman who had just delivered tomorrow's forecast.

"Listen up!" I would shout into the chaos of a confirmation class, when a discussion of Jesus' miracles would abruptly morph into discussions of football or hairstyles. "Let anyone with ears [to hear] listen!" Jesus shouts out into the world. I like to think that he's scolding these disciples who just don't listen intently enough to get what he means. "Yeah, Jesus, tell them!" And then I realize that Jesus could be talking to me about my stopped-up, self-involved ears that don't want to listen, that don't want to get what Jesus is saying. It just might be that when Jesus talks, I'm waiting for my turn to tell him what I want to hear. Am I listening, really listening?

The editors of *Lutheran Woman Today* have been listening. These amazing women read Scripture, pray, and dialogue about their discipleship as they

publish your magazine. They listen earnestly to God. And they listen intently to you, to your telephone calls, e-mails, conversations in circles and gatherings, both synodical and triennial. Like Grandpa Gamelin they have ears and eyes and hearts that listen, and they use them.

One of the things the *LWT* editors have heard is that you yearn to be part of a continuing conversation about family matters, and *how* family matters. They've leaned forward as you've talked, and they've heard that you don't grow tired of talking about the challenges and delights of what we call "family life." Can you imagine a conversation that begins (or ends), "No, I'm just not interested in telling you about my 6-year-old grandson's love of reading" or "my son-in-law who lost his job" or "the woman who was a 'second mother' to me when I was growing up" or "what will happen when Grandpa can't take care of Grandma?"

Pastor Elyse Nelson Winger and I are excited to be part of this dialogue. We'll take turns writing this "Family Matters" column. Family is important to us. We're both in relationships with partners whom we cherish. We're moms. Elyse's children are in those great elementary-school years. Mine are grown and have kids of their own. We have sprawling, extended families. All of these relationships bring

laughter and tears, poignant stories and sleepless nights, and the question, "Where is God in all this?"

I have a whole variety of things I want to talk over with you. How did I end up sitting at a table in Uganda, with a new 2-year-old granddaughter cuddled in my lap? What emotions do I go through when my dad and mom talk with me about what each will do if the other one dies first? How has my husband become my BFF, more and more, the longer we live?

But Elyse and I want to do more than simply *tell* you about family matters. We want to listen to you as intently as Grandpa Gamelin listens to those around him. We'll listen during the coffee hour after worship and in the time before the women's group meeting is called to order. We'll listen on the phone and online. We'll listen to our kids and grandkids as they text us and want us to read *Green Eggs and Ham* one more time. We'll listen to your kids and grandkids in the youth group. And we'll listen to you as you write to *LWT* (at LWT@elca.org) with your ideas and issues, comments and questions.

Elyse and I realize the value in our lives of listening, really listening. To God. And to the story of God at work in all of us.

Jesus, I have ears to hear, and I want to listen, really listen. 🙏

The Rev. Sue Gamelin is a retired pastor.

Meet the writers of Family Matters

Pastor Sue Gamelin grew up in Minnesota, but she and her husband, Tim, have lived in Sri Lanka, Florida, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and North Carolina. She has served as a parish pastor and as an assistant to two bishops. Now retired, her love is "washing feet" in Jesus' name, serving recovering drug addicts and alcoholics, homeless women and men, those in trauma in the local hospital, and residents of a retirement complex near her home. Four children, their spouses, and nine grandchildren delight the Gamelins, as does their life together—laughing, praying, serving, witnessing, and growing in love.

Next month, you'll meet **Pastor Elyse Nelson Winger**, the other writer of this column. She serves as associate pastor for Worship Arts and Mission at St. John's Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Ill. Since marrying in 1998, she and husband, Stewart, have studied, lived, and worked in Chicago, Egypt, the Detroit metro area, and now central Illinois. Their two children, Catherine and Daniel, were born during their Cairo years, and are now in delightful elementary years filled with school, church, music, and sports.

"We try to keep up with them and also find good down time together," Elyse writes. "Stew often evokes the adage: 'Parenting is a verb.' He's right. It's also a wonder and a joy, and surely a vocation."



Leymah Gbowee, a sister Lutheran from Liberia, is no stranger to speaking out about women's issues. "For someone like me, I can't keep quiet because at the end of the day, it's the community that we have," said Gbowee, a member of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Monrovia, Liberia. She has been a key leader and organizer in the struggle to end the civil war in Liberia that began in 1989.

I was privileged to have a conversation with her while she was traveling in the United States last spring to participate in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and the Women in the World Summit in New York City. Gbowee also met with the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and spoke at a briefing on "Combating Violence Against Women: Waging Peace in West Africa," held in March in Washington, D.C.

Although she looked exhausted from all her traveling, her energy level increased dramatically as she passionately spoke to the audience about the peace issues in her home country of Liberia.

"One of my key purposes is to advocate for the rights of women, especially as it relates to women's involvement in issues of peace and security," Gbowee said.

"It's important because political, social, and economic issues impact entire communities. How do you

discuss such issues if you ignore half the population?"

She shared a story about an international group that built a hand pump well in a town without consulting the women in the community. Gbowee said that within two months the women who used the pump were getting drunk.

"The rate of alcoholism just shot up. Why? The long walk to the stream was their time of destressing. This is when they shared problems such as their husbands' promiscuity, the beatings that they received, daughters getting pregnant, children not doing well in school. That was their space for healing," Gbowee said.

When the pump was installed in the community, it became difficult for the women to gather to talk.

"You come to the pump; you fetch your water; and you go back to your house. You're so busy you don't have time to have that chat with your friend. Everything was getting bottled in, so as a means of forgetting about the problems that they were facing, alcohol became the way out for them," she explained.

"Before starting any project, it needs to start from within the community," Gbowee said.

PART OF THE SOLUTION

After the briefing, I asked Gbowee

how she became involved in activism. "My life's ambition was to be a pediatrician," she said. "Then the war came. All the issues of violence—of killings—that I saw around me really made me an angry person. Over time I decided I wanted to be a part of the solution."

And she has been. She serves as the executive director of Women Peace and Security Network Africa and is considered a renowned expert on issues of peace building.

In the award-winning documentary "Pray the Devil Back to Hell," she is a main character, showing the women how they must speak up for peace. Gbowee organized collaborative peace-building initiatives for a network of women peace builders from nine of Liberia's 15 counties.

"My life's ambition was to be a pediatrician. Then the war came."

She also served as the commissioner-designate for the Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Gbowee received the Blue Ribbon Peace Award from the Women's Leadership Board at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

According to Gbowee, there is a trend of hosting international conferences on peace where women are

invited to speak from their experiences. Many resolutions are created, but they don't result in policy changes. Conversation and policy papers are generated, but women become disheartened because nothing much happens.

Despite her frustrations, Gbowee said she is a "serious optimist" about women changing their communities. "I want to help people work through their trauma," she said. Women need to be part of the process of rebuilding their communities, said Gbowee.

MESSAGE OF PEACE

Gbowee understands that women have the most to gain when they are clued into potential uprisings and when they can be involved in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction.

"In Liberia, one of the things we heard was that the women knew when conflict was happening. There were signals that war was pending," said Gbowee. "When there was going to be an attack there was an increase in domestic violence and an increased number of young people selling things on the street."

Also, the women would be physically assaulted and raped. She said the women tried to alert the authorities as new conflicts arose in the war, but some were imprisoned because the officers said they were

"all part of the plan."

But if conflict ends and peace prevails, then the women's families can rebuild their lives. Their husbands and young sons will not have to go and fight and die. The economy will improve and jobs will return to the villages.

"Experiences have taught us that women have the capacity; they have the knowledge; they have the strategies," she said. According to Gbowee, the next step is to help them form strategic partnerships.

In "Pray the Devil Back to Hell," Gbowee was shown to be a key leader in organizing Christian and Muslim women and in persuading the warlords to continue to persevere in the peace talks. The women mobilized and took their message of peace to the rebels and the government in power during the Liberian civil war.

The women would gather to pray and fast at the fish market during the peace talks held in Ghana. At one point, the women staged a sit-in outside the meeting room. Over 200 women sat at the door, looped arms with one another, and declared that they would not let anyone leave the room until the peace agreement was signed.

After the war, Gbowee worked as a social worker in a trauma and healing program sponsored by the Lutheran church. She helped community members deal with

traumatic situations in their lives like witnessing murders first-hand, watching homes in their villages being looted and burned, enduring the pain of seeing children starve because the parents could not feed them, and seeing the recruitment of their sons to fight in the war.

"Until we started working with the perpetrators, the healing wouldn't be complete. I started working with soldiers and security men and women, but eventually God was leading me to another group of people—women," she said.

SPEAKING OUT AND BEING INVOLVED

As Gbowee interacted with the women, she heard issues of domestic violence and of being sexually and physically assaulted. "Some of the girls were in a place they didn't want to be, but they had no option," she said. "Men and women need to speak out about sexual violence."

Likewise, the church needs to speak out about domestic violence issues on three levels, she said. The first level is with governments to ensure proper implementation of anti-violence programs; the second is with lay people and preachers

who speak from the pulpit; and the third level is with outside groups to create opportunities at a grassroots level so women can talk about domestic violence issues.

Gbowee said she does not want to do this work forever. She wants peace, but she also knows she will probably always be an activist.

"One of the steps I can take, though, is to get young women to understand the work that we do as activists," said Gbowee. "We need to explain to them that they are the change that we all should see. We ought to be about the rights of women being respected and women being involved in issues that are critical to their well-being. It can never happen without their involvement and participation."

The work that she does is not for the faint of heart. "There has been joy in all of it, but there has also been pain," Gbowee said. "You don't celebrate too long. You rejoice, you applaud, and you pat yourself on the back. Then you have to look around because there is another issue to tackle." 🌿

Jodi Deike is director for grassroots advocacy and communication in the ELCA Washington office.

LEYMAH GBOWEE IS ONE OF THE KEY SPEAKERS

at the Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering, July 14–17 in Spokane, Wash. You can find out more about the Gathering by going to the Women of the ELCA Web site at www.womenoftheelca.com/triennial1. Visit <http://advocacydays.org> to learn about the March 2011 Ecumenical Advocacy Days event.



LET US PRAY

Welcome to Worship!

by Julie K. Ageson

O God, there is a dark and lonesome gulf in worship, a cavern of the awesome into which we rarely go. We prefer catchy tunes, bright vestments, holiday prayers. We would rather exchange fellowship than touch holiness. Enable us in this precious time to venture into the depths of worship which can never be found totally in individual spirituality but which opens slowly before the shared faith, struggle, and love of the communion of saints. Amen.
(from *Touch Holiness* by R. Duck and M. Tirabassi)

We are people who long to see God's face. When we gather to worship, we come together to hear, taste, and see the goodness of God. At its best, worship shows us into the heart of God and invites us to enact God's reign in our place and time. In worship, we're invited to touch holiness, to encounter God's love and grace in the sacrificial life and death of Jesus.

What does such encounter look like? It begins with gathering. In our common brokenness, wounded and weary, longing for meaning and a way of making sense of the world, we come together in a communal celebration. It's good that we don't have to travel alone, that we meet others along the way. The welcome we share is a reflection of Christ's welcome to us. So we gather to be welcomed to Christ and to bear Christ to one another.

Next we encounter the words of our tradition, the living Word. In music, texts and prayers, we hear the stories of God's unutterable love for all of humankind and all creation. It's time for remembering who we are and who God is. These words bear Christ, the Word, to us, showing us God's generosity, forgiveness, and faithfulness, and inviting us to a new way of living. They are words that

call us to sacrificial living, to be Christ for one another.

In the meal, bread is broken, wine is poured. All are welcomed to the feast. Hearing, tasting, and seeing the goodness of God shows us this new way of life. In bread and wine, Christ offers himself, broken and poured out for the life of the world and for our own starved hearts and minds. In turn we are invited to be food and drink for one another, servants in a hungry world. We participate in two feasts: word and sacrament. Both are equally important. Both draw us more deeply into the heart of God, helping to calm our fears and to know and trust this mysterious God.

And then we are sent. Having gathered together to participate in living words and life-giving sacraments, we go out into the world to be peacemakers, pain bearers, life givers. With sisters and brothers around the globe, we are called to be the heart of God for one another.

May each of us experience worship that is life giving and sustaining. May it be for us and for the world a vision of a new way of living together! 🌿

Julie K. Ageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.



DRESS
GAMES
DRAMA
DANCING
COOKING
FINE ARTS
LITERATURE
EXTERNAL CULTURE

INTERNAL CULTURE

APPROACHES TO PROBLEM SOLVING
ARRANGEMENT OF PHYSICAL SPACE
IDEALS GOVERNING CHILD RAISING
PATTERNS OF DECISION MAKING
CONCEPT OF STATUS MOBILITY
PERCEPTIONS OF CLEANLINESS
RELATIONSHIP TO ANIMALS
NOTIONS OF LEADERSHIP
NOTIONS OF MODESTY
INCENTIVES TO WORK
COURTSHIP PRACTICE
CONCEPT OF JUSTICE
CONCEPT OF BEAUTY
THEORY OF DISEASE
STATUS BY KINSHIP
DEFINITION OF SIN
RULES OF DESCENT
STATUS BY SEX
COSMOLOGY

CULTURAL ICEBERG

by Sunitha Mortha

Growing up in Hyderabad, India, and attending school at the Andhra Theological Christian College and Seminary there, I was proud of

the ancient, rich culture that surrounded me.

Living in Chicago today, I love sharing classical Indian dance, Bol-

lywood movies, and my cooking creations with friends. Chicken curry, for example, is a classic dish every Indian woman makes her

own way. First, I grind my own ginger and garlic. Then I mix them with green and yellow onions, green chili, tomato, chili powder, turmeric, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, and coriander powder. After the chicken stews in all these spices, I finish it with a little lime, and dish it up over basmati rice.

My friends think my curry is delicious, and they love to join me in Indian dancing. But there is one aspect of my culture they question: arranged marriage.

What ideas come to your mind when you think of arranged marriage? When I teach about culture at ELCA Global Mission Gatherings, I hear responses like “loveless,” “oppressive,” “old men taking advantage of young women.” The most frequent answer I get is “they have no choice.”

Tall, grande, venti; rare, medium, well done: Americans love their choices, especially when it comes to relationships. But is it possible to choose everything? Aren't there many times in our lives when we don't have a choice?

Love, for example. Can we always choose whom we love? What about your parents, siblings, or children? You didn't get to choose their personalities, hair color, or sense of humor, but it's a good bet that love happened anyway. *Happened* may not be the right word. Love grew during a journey that you shared.

A key to beginning to understand the Indian perspective on arranged marriage is that we believe what binds a couple together isn't a shared past, but a shared future. The journey unites you. Raised by loving—and like most relatives, slightly dysfunctional—parents and an extended family whose arranged marriages were strong and affectionate, my big sister and I deeply understood this point of view. To many Indians we knew, the American system of love and marriage sounded strange!

Underwater culture

In my presentations at the Global Mission Gatherings, I use the analogy of an iceberg to show why people from different cultures struggle to understand one another.

Our culture is how we understand life. It is a set of beliefs, values, and behaviors that is reinforced from cradle to grave. When we behave according to cultural standards, we are rewarded. When we cross or ignore them, beware!

Like an iceberg, only a small part of our culture is above water. Usually, it's the most public parts, like food, dress, music, language, religion, and holidays. You might guess that, because I'm from India, I likely eat curry, dress occasionally in a *salwar kameez* (an Indian pantsuit), and speak the language native to my area.

Underwater concepts give meaning to the above-water behavior. They can be invisible to people who live inside a culture and are almost incomprehensible to outsiders.

Love is a good example. My sister, whose marriage was arranged by my parents, grew up with a collectivist understanding of love. For Indians, love has more to do with the good of community and family than the preferences of individuals. While the system is not perfect and there are abuses, a carefully arranged marriage can enhance the family's common good.

Americans are raised in a culture that sees love as an individual matter. They usually choose a partner, and see the ritual of dating, engagement, and marriage as perfectly natural. Although, I have plenty of single friends who are tired of dating and just wish someone would arrange a marriage for them!

Alike but different

In Genesis 11:1, “the whole earth had one language and one speech.” But when the people attempted to build a tower to the heavens, God “confused” their language (11:7) and named the city Babel (which means confused). Since then, we have spoken different languages and conducted life in a rainbow of fashions.

Yet we share basic questions: What is the meaning of life? How do we feed ourselves? How shall

we raise our children? How shall we love and marry?

The cultural solutions to these shared questions become a kind of lens through which we see the world. I see the world through a lens shaped by the Indian answers to these questions. You might see the world through a lens shaped by North American answers.

These cultural lenses can make us judgmental. We are tempted to believe that our answers—as they inform our way of living—are the right way and that our own ethnic group and culture are superior to all others.

This ethno-centricism leads to seeing other groups and customs not as different, but as wrong. Driving is a good example. In the United States, we drive on the right side of the road. In Britain, people drive on . . . the wrong side!

Arranged marriage can draw lots of judgment. Once, when I mentioned that my marriage had not been arranged, an American woman said, “how progressive.” Do you suppose if I had told her about my sister and her husband, that she would have called them backward?

As we approach other cultures, perhaps we can begin to replace judgment with understanding—a necessary tool for today’s diverse and mobile world. Once, arranged marriage was something Americans only read about. Now, the family next door may be arranging a marriage for their own children.

Cultural diversity can be complicated, controversial, and overwhelming. The tense topics of race and culture can cause us to become defensive or to shut down. When we acknowledge that cultural icebergs exist, and that there can be more

than one way to view and value the world, we can move toward understanding of other cultures.

The ability to cross cultures begins with an understanding of your own cultural makeup. I invite you to explore what’s under the tip of your iceberg. What have you learned about love? About feeding your family? About caring for children? How have those lessons influenced your choices and your lens?

When we recognize our own lenses, we can explore the under-water of other cultures. We can see the story of the tower of Babel as an invitation to experience God’s love for us not through conformity, but through diverse culture and languages. And we can move together into this colorful world with joy and curiosity. 🌸

Sunitha Mortha is director of the ELCA Global Formation Program.

GLOCAL MISSION GATHERINGS

The cultural iceberg is an image that can help us recognize our own deep ethnocentricity and how it affects us. It can also help us understand our next-door neighbors as well as neighbors we encounter in the work we are called to do together in our churches and our women’s units.

Using a global concept to explore a local context is something that happens at the Glocal Mission Gatherings. These low-cost, two-day events offer more opportunities for learning and growing in our appreciation of a complex world.

The Glocal Mission Gathering brings together experts and resources on global and domestic ministry for one weekend so congregational leaders can build ministry skills, no matter where

they serve. Your gifts, shared at this event, will strengthen us together to engage in God’s mission everywhere.

These gatherings recognize that mission takes place everywhere in the world—including North America, where it influences our ministry every day. By understanding how God’s activity is changing the world around us, we can build and develop skills that help us engage, serve, support, learn, and travel more faithfully, globally and domestically. These skills can help you be an effective part of God’s mission.

For a list of gatherings scheduled for 2011, please visit www.elca.org/globalevents or see event photos and learn more on our Facebook page (<http://tinyurl.com/Glocal-Mission-Gathering>).

Established in 1997, Today's Dream: Tomorrow's Reality (TDTR) is Women of the ELCA's network of peer educators who have answered a call issued by the organization in 1996: to learn how to become an anti-racist organization.

The TDTR network continues today helping Women of the ELCA live out its 13th organizational principle to "claim and practice an anti-racist identity."

TDTR teams provide educational presentations and workshops for Women of the ELCA synodical boards and conventions, clusters/conferences, and congregational units. They also provide conference/cluster retreats and leadership retreats. Many are also active as members of their ELCA synod anti-racism and racial harmony efforts.

The TDTR network has a wide selection of presentation topics that go deeper into the analysis of racial privilege as well as racial oppression. TDTR workshops are available in many areas, and presenters can adapt their materials to suit opportunities of varying lengths.

A one-day workshop, for example, could include:

- Bible study
- Definitions of racism and recognition of God's call to battle against it; and
- Introductions to concepts such as "institutional racism," "white privilege," and "cultural conditioning."

The workshops ideally include at least 10 people, to allow for effective and powerful group interaction. The workshop hosts are asked to cover travel expenses,


including meals and lodging, for workshop leaders. In some instances, synodical organizations provide their team with a budget line to defray these expenses. In addition, you will need to work with the workshop facilitator(s) to secure printed resources.

The quickest way to learn whether there are trained leaders in your area is to send me email at InezTorres.Davis@elca.org. Your synodical women's organization president should also be able to connect you to your local synodical anti-racism team members.

Cross-Cultural Programming

Women of the ELCA is committed to meeting the challenges and lifting up the rich opportunities of a world that continues to grow more diverse. As a result of developing an anti-racist identity, we are committed to developing cross-cultural relationships that are mutually strengthening. We are committed to discovering creative and cooperative responses that use our gifts and resources.

Women of the ELCA's cross-cultural programming provides tools for effectively relating across the barriers that both define and separate us into cultural groupings. Our cross-cultural programming energizes and expands our community and world views, providing opportunity for both growth and action.

Women of the ELCA's cross-cultural immersion events allow women to experience another culture. Participants gain knowledge, learn the history, and share in the creation of increased cross-cultural competency as they build community across cultures. 

Inez Torres Davis is Women of the ELCA director for justice.



HEALTH WISE

The Truth About Your Thyroid

by Molly M. Ginty

In her teens, Ann-Marie

Mitchell went to extremes.

She gained 40 excess pounds and felt sluggish most of the day because her thyroid, the gland that regulates metabolism, was underactive. Then suddenly, her thyroid made a dramatic turnaround and became overactive, making her shed weight too quickly and leaving her so jittery that she sometimes couldn't remember her locker combination at school.

Eventually, Mitchell had to have her thyroid gland removed and to start taking daily doses of a synthetic hormone that mimics one naturally produced by the thyroid gland. "At last, my weight and my energy levels have stabilized, making it possible for me to go about my life without going up and down," says Mitchell, now age 42 and a boutique owner in Dexter, Missouri.

Affecting up to 20 percent of women at some point in their lives, thyroid problems can have a powerful impact on your health. "The thyroid gland is crucial because it oversees so many of your body's activities," says endocrinologist Martin Surks, M.D., a professor at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx, New York. "In children, the thyroid regulates growth and brain development. And in adults, it helps control how many calories we burn, how much oxygen we use—and even the temperature of our bodies."

Since thyroid problems are significantly more common in women than in men—and since they are of special concern during pregnancy—here's what

you need to know about your thyroid gland during January, which is Thyroid Awareness Month.

Located at the base of your throat, just below your Adam's apple and weighing less than an ounce, the thyroid produces two main hormones: triiodothyronine (T-3) and thyroxine (T-4), which together influence every cell in your body. These hormones help determine how fast your heart beats and how quickly your body produces proteins and uses fats and carbohydrates. The thyroid gland also produces calcitonin, a hormone that helps regulate the amount of calcium in your blood.

When the thyroid gland is overactive, it churns out too much thyroxine, leading to what is called hyperthyroidism. This condition can be triggered by nodules or lumps on the thyroid gland. It can also be caused by an autoimmune disorder called Grave's disease, which not only revs up the metabolism, but can also alter the eyes, making them protrude or bulge slightly. Hyperthyroidism, affecting up to 6 percent of people, can result in a rapid heartbeat, weight loss, tremors, sweating, irritability, and muscle weakness. You can treat it with beta-blockers (which slow the heartbeat), radioactive iodine (which shrinks an overactive thyroid), and medications to curb the overproduction of thyroxine. In severe cases, it may be necessary to have surgery to remove the thyroid gland and to take a synthetic hormone (called levothyroxine and sold under several brand names) to replace the body's natural thyroxin.

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

Half as common as hyperthyroidism is its opposite: hypothyroidism, in which the thyroid gland is underactive and produces too little thyroxine. Hypothyroidism can cause bodily functions to slow down significantly, leading to weight gain, fatigue, increased sensitivity to cold, and a general lack of energy. It can be triggered by Hashimoto's disease (in which the immune system mistakenly produces antibodies that attack the thyroid gland) or by some prescription drugs (such as lithium, a medication for psychiatric disorders).

The most common treatment for hypothyroidism is taking synthetic levothyroxine to supplement insufficient levels of natural thyroxine.

If you have hyperthyroidism or hypothyroidism, you may develop a third thyroid condition: goiter, in which the thyroid gland swells considerably, engorging the neck and sometimes doubling its circumference. Treated with levothyroxin, surgery, and radioactive iodine, goiter is more common in developing countries than it is in the United States, where the common use of salt containing iodine (a mineral that is required by the thyroid and that staves off goiter) has slashed the prevalence of this condition in recent generations.

A fourth problem that can affect the thyroid gland is thyroid cancer. Characterized by pain while swallowing, hoarseness while speaking, and a lump of cancerous tissue at the base of the throat, thyroid cancer is typically treated with a round of remedies: the

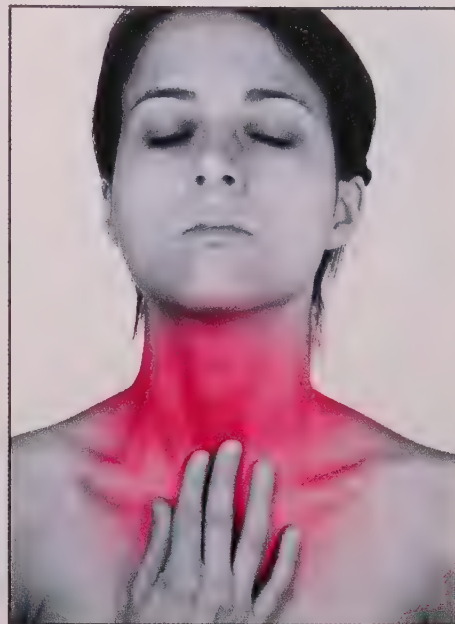
removal of the thyroid, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and levothyroxine to replace thyroxine. These treatments are so effective that 96 percent of thyroid cancer patients overcome it and eventually recover their health.

Even if you show no sign of thyroid problems, you should nevertheless ingest at least 150 micrograms of iodine per day. Plentiful in seafood and seaweed, iodine can also be found in most table salts and in daily multivitamins.

"Getting sufficient iodine is especially important for women during pregnancy because a baby's thyroid gland starts functioning at 12 weeks in utero and uses the mother's blood as its iodine supply," says Surks, who said health authorities are considering adding extra iodine to prenatal vitamins.

There are two other reasons for expectant moms to watch their thyroid health. A hormone produced during pregnancy (human chorionic gonadotropin or HCG) can negatively affect a woman's thyroid gland. Also, thyroid problems can negatively impact her baby. For these reasons, the Endocrine Society recommends that all women be screened for thyroid problems during their pregnancies. 🌸

Molly M. Ginty (<http://mollymaureenginty.wordpress.com>) lives in New York City. Her work has appeared in *Women's eNews*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Ms*.



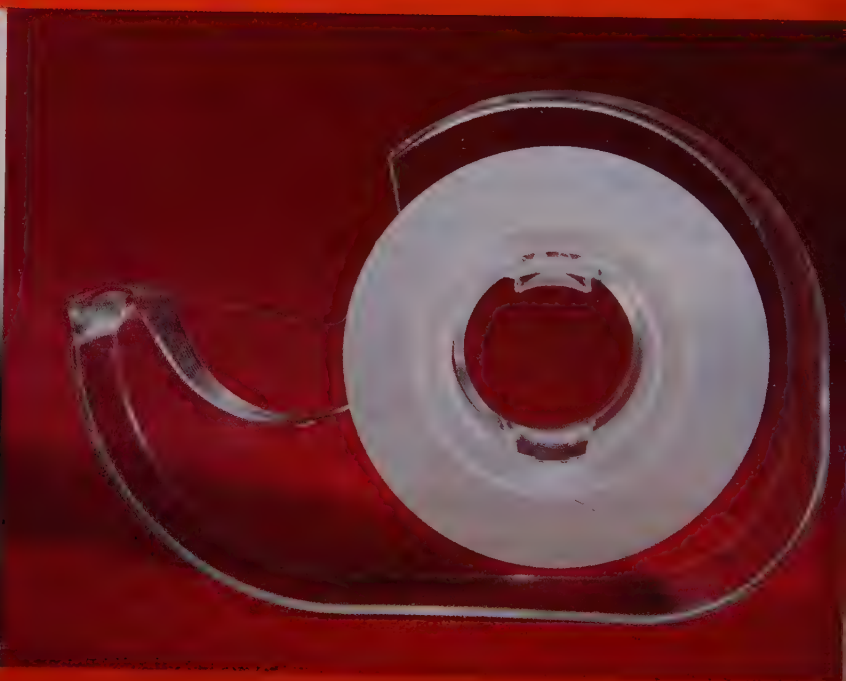
For more information:

The Endocrine Society
www.endo-society.org/

American Thyroid Association
www.thyroid.org

SCOTCH TAPE *and* BALING WIRE

by Nora Gallagher



Editor's note: This excerpt from Nora Gallagher's book, The Sacred Meal, has been reprinted with permission from Thomas Nelson, Inc. The book is available at bookstores everywhere. Gallagher will be a keynote speaker at the Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering, July 14–17, 2011, in Spokane, Wash. To learn more, visit www.womenoftheelca.org.



When my husband and I walked into the bakery, I knew something was wrong. My friend Jodie was pushing back tears with the heel of her hand. Frank, her husband, was sitting across the table from her, somber, watchful. Are they getting a divorce? I thought. Has something happened to one of the children? I put my hand on Jodie's shoulder and sat down.

"What's wrong?"

"It's Frankie," Jodie said. "Val's daughter. You remember Val and Kirk?"

"Yes, I do." Val, an architect, a woman whose face was all kindness. Kirk, her husband, handsome, gentle, a builder. Francesca, Frankie, their younger daughter. How old was she now? Twelve? I remembered Frankie and her sister, sweet little girls in dresses, at a party years ago, too shy to talk to strangers, and Val leaning down to talk to the littler one like a mother when covering her daughter with a wing.

"She's missing in Panama. A small plane."

The call had come the night before, Sunday.

Frankie was on vacation with a school friend, Thalia Klein, and Thalia's father, Michael Klein. Michael, age thirty-seven, had taken the two girls in a chartered Cessna that day from to the Chiriqui volcano. In rain and fog, the pilot had radioed the airport that he could not see the runway to land and had then disappeared. Witnesses said later that they saw or heard a small plane flying too low in the jungle toward the mountains.

As soon as they got the call, Val and Kirk had asked a neighbor to drive them to the airport in Los Angeles. Kim Klein, Thalia's mother, and Robert Klein, Michael's father, were now also on their way to Panama. Once there, the families traveled to the resort city of Boquete, as close to the crash as they could get. On Monday morning, Christmas Eve, an early

attempt at a search had been called off because of the weather. Later that morning, another airplane tried to take off but came back because of driving rain, fog, and high winds. Several friends who were bush pilots flew down to try to assist the families.

The terrain in the interior of Panama is dense jungle, with mountains rising to 3,500 feet.

I can't pray

Anxiety gripped me. It was a different kind of worry from anything I had felt before. It was as if I were almost feeling what Val was feeling. Almost. It was the not knowing. The feeling was intolerable. And then I felt my own feeling: helplessness. Nothing I could do from so far away. Should my husband and I get on a plane and join a search party? (The heroic response, but the rational reply would be, You don't really speak Spanish, Nora, and you can't fly a plane or even read a compass.) And then I real-

ized that Val, too, must feel helpless. This woman who had protected her daughters at a party must be insane with helplessness.

Jodie promised to keep in touch, and my husband and I went home. My husband's family was in town for the holiday. There were presents still to be wrapped. Chicken chili stew to be prepared for a light dinner after the early service at church. The weather was bad, the ceiling low, so the search planes could not take off. No news as the day wore on.

And so at 3:30, I drove over to the hotel to pick up my mother-in-law, Peggy, and take her to church. She and I have this little routine over the holidays. We go to the early service, the "children's Christmas Eve service," because we've grown fond of watching the kids act out the Christmas story. Then we can go back to our house and settle in, trim the tree, and go to bed early. Peggy was dressed and ready; she asked me if there had been any more news and told me the story was on TV.

It was quiet at the church as we walked up the steps and greeted the ushers. I found us a pew toward the front so we'd have a good view of the pageant to come. As I settled Peggy into her seat, I looked up and saw a girl Frankie's age talking to her mother, her face that particular 12-year-old girl combination of child

and teenager, still with the childlike vulnerability and openness not yet covered over with a teenage mask, and I burst into tears. I stood there, and what had been lying under everything all day came up to the fore. I can't pray, I thought. I have so much anxiety that I can't find my way through to pray. I don't even know how to pray. What should I pray for? Who should I pray for?

The gifts of God

Frankie, stay with the plane, I had thought earlier in the day. Was that a prayer? I stood there, crying, and then I saw Eva, our associate priest,

AND I, TODAY, WAS DOING THE STITCHING.

walking across the altar area. I found myself leaving the pew and walking toward her.

"Oh, hi," she said, in that tone that says, I've got about two minutes. I told her, "A friend's daughter is missing in a plane, a crash probably. Will you pray for her? I don't know how." And I cried again.

"Oh, no," she said. "Oh, of course I will. And I suppose, well, I guess it's not too good a time, but I was going to ask you to help with Communion."

Something stirred in me. "I can

do that," I said, and immediately regretted it. I was hardly in a state to serve the wine. I almost said, "Oh, sorry, no I can't," but she was turning away; she had a lot of work to do. I didn't see anyone in the near vicinity who could take my place. I walked back to the pew.

The choir began to sing "O Come, All Ye Faithful," and everyone stood up. The kids brought in a wood cradle and put it near the altar. Two kids, around 14 years old—Mary in a pair of jeans and a blue scarf over her head and Joseph, a skinny boy with dark hair—came in and stood near it. A flock of angels, ages three to four, with gauzy wings walked up the aisle and floated around Mary and Joseph, weakly flapping their arms. They'd flap and then forget and sort of stand there; one held her thumb

firmly in her mouth.

Then we got to the point in the service when Eva lifted up the bread and wine and said, "The gifts of God for the people of God." That was my cue, and I walked up to the altar to receive the wine and bread. Then I took a goblet of wine from one of the acolytes and started to serve at communion.

It is always its own thing, serving the wine. Once when I served the wine, I saw the mark of lips on the cup just before I wiped it off, and I thought how the trace of

our lips on the cup are the traces of human on the infinite, a fragile moment recorded, and then time moves on.

"The blood of Christ," I said to Elaine, who is 96, a former dancer. "The cup of salvation." She looked at me as she received, and she placed her hand on my arm.

"The blood of Christ," I said to my mother-in-law, who held my sleeve. The tears were running down my cheeks, and there was nothing I could do about them.

Stitched together

And then, all of a sudden, I got it. I got what I needed to know that day.

Holy Communion was a web, a web of people who were being stitched together. And tomorrow, we would need to be stitched together again. Over and over. One person to the next. And I, today, was doing the stitching. In my weakened, anxious, weepy state, along with another chalice minister, who was working next to me, I was making basting stitches, the kind I learned in home economics from Mrs. Davis in seventh grade. Nothing fancy, nothing permanent.

A little boy dropped his bread on the floor, and his mother picked it up and without a moment's hesitation popped it into her mouth. I missed the right placement on a gray-haired woman and touched

her lips with my finger, and she frowned. A guy tried to dip his own bread and got his finger in the wine, and I wanted to smack him. Here we were: the rough material.

And then it was over. I went back to the pew and sat down next to my mother-in-law. She patted my hand. I wept and wept and wept. Then we stood to sing "Silent Night" and we walked out into the chilly December air.

Just as we got back to our house, Jodie called. The rain was still falling in Panama, and visibility remained low. Val and Kirk and the Klein family had organized

NOTHING FANCY, NOTHING PERMANENT.

a search party to comb the area where the plane was last seen. A map had been drawn up, and the area had been divided into sectors. Kim Klein had offered \$25,000 to anyone who could find the plane. As many as 50 people set out on Tuesday morning at 4 a.m.

Christmas Day. We opened our stockings and gifts. The family sat around for a while, then decided to go over and visit another distant family member in town for the holidays. I declined. Suddenly, more than anything, what I needed was

sleep. I lay down on the window seat in our dining room, with the kitty lying on my legs, and the two of us went out like lights. Frankie, I thought, stay with the plane.

My cell phone was ringing. Where was it?

"They found the plane," Jodie said. "There is one survivor. They think it's Frankie." And then, she started to cry.

I fell to my knees on my dining room floor.

A practice is something we do that is always the same and always different. In the world we live in, we do things over and over so we can get better at them—better at soccer, playing the piano, things that have measurable scorecards. But that is not what a spiritual practice is.

That Christmas afternoon, I was in great need. And I understood that Holy Communion was about stitching people together. I needed to be stitched together myself. It was not the kind of stitching that would last forever. It was more like what my father said when he did a job that was only temporary: "That's Scotch tape and baling wire, but it will do for now." 🌸

Nora Gallagher is a writer and preacher. Her books include *Things Seen and Unseen: A Year Lived in Faith* and *Practicing Resurrection*. She is preacher-in-residence at Trinity Episcopal Church in Santa Barbara, Calif.

BREAKING *the rules*

by Gladys G. Moore



“Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...”

*“I will pour out my spirit an **all** flesh...”*

Words like *everyone* and *all* are difficult to divide.

They encompass every single one of us—people from every tribe and tongue and nation...

The young mother walks into church with her newborn and toddler in tow. Her husband is serving his second tour of duty in Iraq and since she's fairly new to the neighborhood, she's looking for a supportive church community—hopefully with other young families—where she and her children might worship.

The friendly greeting at the church door bodes well as they make their way to a pew near the back of the church. So too does the “welcome bag” given to her and to the other two visitors during the announcements. But things start to deteriorate quickly when the baby begins to cry and his big sister starts asking for crayons too loudly.

Only a few heads turn as the baby's crying continues unabated. Still, the twisting heads and chilly stares thunder disapproval through their silence. The mother can almost hear the thoughts racing through the minds of those who have looked at her: “Why doesn't that woman take the baby to the narthex? Can't she keep her children quiet? We're trying to worship God here!”

Perhaps this story has a ring of familiarity to you. Sadly, it's not so uncommon in some of our congregations. Even as we proclaim our welcome through bulletin boards and goody bags, our behavior often reveals attitudes of displeasure with those who do not meet our stan-

dards of acceptability. Whether it's noisy children, people of a different race or ethnicity whose very presence signals discomfort, or the guests from the congregation's mid-day meal ministry who don't smell like lilacs and roses, sometimes our hidden rules and norms prevent us from being the mission-minded servants God expects us to be.

VISION OF INCLUSION

I'll never forget my experience when I first started worshipping in a Lutheran church. I joined the choir almost immediately because I love making music with others. Within a week or two of my initial appearance with the choir, an older woman decided to leave the congregation. Before she left she told the choir director: “If you get any more like her you may as well become holy rollers!”

Even though nothing had changed in this congregation except the complexion of the choir (and it was a minimal change at that) everything had changed, at least for this woman and a few of her friends. For no longer could she pretend that everyone was welcome in “her” church. Sure, the gospel was for everyone but that didn't mean that they should come to her congregation.

“They” had their own churches, she said. Why didn't they just worship there?

Yes, as long as designations like “them” and “us” reside in our hearts and heads, as long as our churches recognize the “insiders” but shun the “outsiders,” then we must ask ourselves whether we are being true to the compassionate hospitality that Jesus himself practiced.

While the context was different in the first century, the issues of inclusion within the family of God were not. Early Christian communities struggled just as many of us do with questions of who's in and who's out, with who belongs and who doesn't.

God's vision of inclusion had been signaled centuries earlier through prophets like Isaiah and Joel: “Ho, *everyone* who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!” “Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on *all flesh*; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.” “Then *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved...”

Words like *everyone* and *all* are difficult to divide. They encompass every single one of us—people from every tribe and tongue and nation, folks from every class, culture, and country of origin. Yet first century and 21st century disciples still wres-

tle with such issues. This was precisely the lesson that Peter needed to learn in Acts 10.

BEYOND THE BOUNDS

Luke had indicated God's inclusive intentions time and again throughout his Gospel. As early as the second chapter, Simeon declared that with his own eyes he had seen the salvation that God had prepared in the presence of *all peoples*. And then he announced the scope of that salvation—that in Jesus, God was even reaching out to Gentiles: “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:29–32).

Two chapters later, Luke once again indicates that God is up to something new. In his very first sermon, Jesus preached that he was anointed to bring good news to those who were poor, captive, blind, and oppressed. And then he boldly reminded his listeners that their courageous prophet of old, Elijah, had even shared God's goodness beyond the bounds of Israel. Needless to say, Jesus did not win any popularity contests with that proclamation. In fact, the congregation he was preaching to ran him out of town and tried to hurl him off a cliff (Luke 4:18–30). Sometimes including those who seem beyond the pale of God's redemption make folks boiling mad!

In Luke's Gospel and Acts the reiteration of the Pentecost message from Joel 2 and the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 2 and 8) were further indications of the Spirit's inclusive trajectory. Now in Acts 10, in the powerful story of Peter and Cornelius, Peter finally catches on to what God's Spirit has been doing all along.

The visions of Cornelius and Peter signify how deeply attuned to God both men were. Cornelius is a devout and God-fearing Gentile, Peter a faithful disciple of the resurrected Jesus. And while neither yet understood what God was preparing through their imminent encounter with each other, they were nevertheless obedient.

OPEN HEARTS AND MINDS

For all their similarity, their differences could not have been more obvious. Peter is a Jew and Cornelius a Gentile. Peter is staying in the home of Simon the tanner; Cornelius is in his own home. While Peter is a fisherman, Cornelius is a centurion, a soldier. Peter experiences the hospitality of Simon the tanner and extends it to Cornelius' representatives. Cornelius receives Peter and extends hospitality to him and his traveling companions from Joppa. Cornelius is awed by the presence of Peter; Peter is humbled by Cornelius' admiration.

Contrasts aside, it is the insights gained from the experience these men have with one another that serve as a fitting reminder of what can happen when we let God open our hearts and minds to those who are radically different from us. Indeed, the dialogue between these seemingly polar opposites (and their companions) indicates the power of really listening to those from whom we differ most so we might come to common understandings.

Peter's brief sermon testifies to this truth. As he talked with Cornelius, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them, “You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.... I truly understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”

What a compelling message he shared that day! And how appropriate Peter's learning is for us today who continue to struggle with issues of inclusion and exclusion within the church. Should gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people be accepted in the Christian church, let alone be pastors? How shall we receive those who are undocumented immigrants? Is anyone “illegal” in the eyes of God?

Regardless of one's political affiliations, what does our allegiance to Christ and his gospel say to us who

would exclude those whom God has chosen to include?
Can we take Peter's words to heart that God shows *no partiality to those in every nation who fear God and do what is right?*

FAITHFUL TO THE MESSAGE

If we 21st-century disciples would practice the depth and breadth of hospitality that our ancient brothers and sisters practiced, our witness to the world would be so much stronger. For ultimately, as Andrew Arterbury has said in his book, *Entertaining Angels: Hospitality in Luke and Acts*, "This passage teaches that Jesus' disciples in all generations must allow God to move them past their prejudices. Through the ministry of Christian hospitality God can forge permanent, interdependent bonds among his followers and with those who have previously been seen as 'strangers.'"

Who is it that you or your congregation struggles to receive or include?

What might the story of Peter and Cornelius say to you as you wrestle with being faithful to the message of Scripture and at the same time, faithful to the spirit of the living Christ who continues, as Luther's Small Catechism says, "to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole Christian church on earth"?

One of my favorite hymns in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW 641) sums up the thrust of this passage beautifully. Written by Marty Haugen, "*All Are Welcome*" encourages the same gospel reception and sense of hospitality that Peter discovered in this story from Acts 10. Haugen's words echo the yearnings of many:

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all
can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell how hearts
learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith
and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions;

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome
in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live
the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image
of God's face;

Let us bring an end to fear and danger:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome
in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named, their
songs and visions heard and loved and treasured,
taught and claimed as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of
faith and songs of grace, let this house proclaim
from floor to rafter:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome
in this place.*

As we lean into the ways of God and seek to be faithful to God's radically inclusive vision, we might well remember, as did the early church, that we should never go it alone. When Peter went from Joppa to Caesarea he took some of the circumcised believers with him—namely, some Jewish Christians. And when Cornelius welcomed Peter to his home, his relatives and friends were there also.

May the circles of our inclusion continue to expand outward until the whole world lives under the umbrella of God's all-encompassing love. 🌿

The Rev. Gladys G. Moore is an ordained pastor in the ELCA. She serves as dean of religious and spiritual life at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Mass.

* "*All Are Welcome*" by Marty Haugen, Copyright © 1994 by GIA Publications, Inc., 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638 www.giamusic.com 800.442.1358. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Worship

by Linda Johnson Seyenkulo and Jensen Seyenkulo

WORSHIP RESOURCES

ELW Evangelical Lutheran Worship (*also known as the red book*)

LBW Lutheran Book of Worship (*also known as the green book*)

WOV With One Voice (*also known as the blue book*)

TFF This Far By Faith (*also known as the African American hymnal*)

LLC Libro de Liturgia y Cántico (*also known as the Latino hymnal*)

W&P Worship and Praise (*also known as the contemporary hymnal*)

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Amos 3:3 (KJV)

THEME VERSE

"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23–24

MAIN TEXT

John 4:3–30

Guidelines and Discussion Method for our Time Together

To facilitate the discussion of this session, we are going to adapt the rules for engagement and the invitation method of discussion, both of which are printed in their entirety in the September 2010 issue and available online at www.lutheranwomantoday.org. At the start of each session, we ask that you refresh your memory of these two vital elements. Adhering to them—especially when more sensitive topic areas come into play—helps to assure that productive discussions can respectfully take place, leading to growth and greater appreciation for all who are members of the body of Christ.

OPENING

Let's open today's session with a song and prayer.

SONG

"Golden Breaks the Dawn" *ELW* 852

PRAYER

God of all wonders, we gather as your people to praise your holy name. Open our hearts and our spirits to be fed by your Holy Spirit. Help us to know the wonder and diversity of ways you appear to your people. May our experience of worship today offer us some of the comfort of the familiar and some of the inspiration of the new and different. We know that you have called us, and many others, by name. We praise your holy name and we call on your presence as we gather in that name. Amen.

DEVOTIONAL READING

Lectio Divina

We are going to prepare for our time together today by engaging in *Lectio Divina*, an ancient spiritual practice where a Bible passage is read and then there is time for meditation on the word of God. The purpose is to pray the Scripture. We will use the overall theme verse Amos 3:3 and the

theme verse for this session of the Bible study (John 4:23–24).

Begin by breathing deeply and getting focused. Breathe deeply and slowly, focusing on each breath.

Listen to Amos 3:3. Then listen to John 4:23–24. Simply listen to the whole text. The text will be read at a slower pace than usual without emphasis on any particular words.

Reflect during the minute of silence.

Listen to Amos 3:3 and John 4:23–24 again. Listen for a word or phrase that grabs your attention. During the next minute of silence, silently pray with that word or phrase.

1. Using the invitation method (see the September 2010 issue or online at www.lutheranwomantoday.org) share (with no explanation or conversation) a word or phrase that grabbed your attention.
2. How might that word or phrase be a prayer, an invitation, a word of encouragement, or a challenge for you today?

OVERVIEW

Worship, which unites us with God, can divide us as God's people. There are congregations who report "worship wars." It may be as simple as differences of opinion about organ versus piano, or bells versus drums. It may be a new hymnal. Differences in tradition, music styles, liturgy, vestments, and even Bible versions can become our focus rather than our shared faith in Jesus Christ.

The word of God says to make a joyful noise and to praise God's name. We can do that in many and varied ways. In this session, we hear the word, sing the songs, and think about our worship traditions. Our theme verse suggests that what is necessary for worship is spirit and truth.

SONG (*select one*)

"O Day Full of Grace" *ELW* 627, *LBW* 161

"Lord I Lift Your Name on High" *ELW* 857, *W&P* 90

GATHERING TIME

In this session we will talk about things that unite and divide us as community. Share with each other a short description of a significant worship experience you've had. It could be from your youth or as recent as last Sunday. Describe it and give a one-word description of how it affected you.

HISTORICAL READING

The story for today is the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:3–30). It may seem a strange choice for a session on worship but at the core of the surprise of this meeting of Jesus with the woman was the history of strained relationships between the Jews and the Samaritans. There were several reasons for this, all of which led the Jews to believe that the Samaritans were ritually unclean. In other words, their worship (because ritual cleansing was worship) was suspect. There were very few interactions between Samaritans and Jews.

Enter Jesus. He and his disciples have been walking for a long time. It is the middle of the day as he comes to a well. His disciples go off some place. He sees a woman by herself and asks her for a drink of water.

This is amazing, in two ways. First, remember that Jesus is a Jewish man. The act of a Jewish man speaking to a woman he does not know is unheard of; it is virtually unthinkable! Note the response of the disciples in verse 27. They were shocked that he was talking to a woman, a Samaritan woman at that, and in particular, *that* kind of a woman (someone with a questionable past).

The second amazing thing is the woman is a Samaritan and therefore considered ritually unclean by Jews. Yet Jesus asks her to give him a drink of water.

It is difficult to explain in our culture and various social locations, how unusual this situation would be: a Samaritan, a woman, talked to by a Jewish man who did not know her.

Then the plot thickens. Not only is this a Samaritan woman but also an outcast, even among Samaritans. She has come by herself to draw water during the hottest part of the day when any sensible person would stay home in the shade. No doubt she came at this time of day so she could avoid contact with others who are aware of her reputation around town. According to her report to the rest of the citizens of her town, Jesus tells her “everything she has ever done.”

In response to Jesus’ report of her activities, she brings up worship, one of the fundamental differences between Jews and Samaritans. Jews and Samaritans had many differences in how they lived out their faith lives. Samaritans were considered unclean because they did not keep all the ritual practices the Jews did. (See “Breaking the Rules,” p. 26.)

This is the crux of our study today. The Samaritan woman and Jesus have a conversation about worship. She tells him Samaritans worship in one place and Jews worship in another. Jesus tells her there is a time coming when those issues will not matter. Jesus says, “the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Eugene Peterson paraphrases those verses in the *Message Remix* in this way, “the time is coming . . . when what you’re called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter. It’s who you are and the way you live that counts before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people the Father is out looking for; those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship.”

(Please excuse the male dominant language present in the *Message Remix* here and in a couple of the other passages quoted in this section. While some envision God as male entity, others relate to God in different ways. Male-dominant language aside, we feel the *Message Remix* resource offers a valuable perspective.)

At times in history there were very specific rules and regulations about worship. They were based on the laws written in the Hebrew testament (see Leviticus and Deuteronomy.)

Jesus’ words about worshiping in spirit and truth are quite a break from the tradition. Traditionally Jerusalem was the center of worship. Jesus is breaking that open and saying that *he* is the center for worship. He is saying that the old methods of piety are different now for God’s people. The center of worship has moved from a particular place (for the Jews, Jerusalem and the temple; for the Samaritans, Mount Gerizim) to the purity of heart and commitment of that heart to Jesus as Messiah, as the savior for the world. Jesus seems to be saying that the tradition is not the most important part of worship. Worship comes from the heart of the believer and the commitment of the believer to engage wholeheartedly in worshipping God.

As we begin our study of Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman, let us sing together in Spanish or English or both.

SONG

“*Cantad Al Señor*” (“O Sing to the Lord”) ELW 822, WOV 795

READ JOHN 4:3–30.

First read the whole Bible text out loud as a group. Then have a different person read verses 19-26. These are the verses we want to emphasize for our discussion. Break into smaller groups for the discussion piece.

Jesus does indeed come with a “new song” for the Samaritan woman. They were two folks who came

from differing religious traditions, yet found worship to be a common theme of interest. Their interaction around worship was based on the learning they had both done around traditions of where and who was included in the community of faith, traditions of cleanliness and purity, traditions around appropriate places for worship and many other traditions.

Let's do some talking and thinking about worship. In groups of three or four, again use the invitation method to discuss the following questions.

3. What do verses 19-24 have to say about worship and what is important in worship?
4. What does the phrase *worship in spirit and truth* mean to you?
5. If you were the Samaritan woman and Jesus came to you with this new way of thinking about worship, what would your response be? Remember that he is essentially telling the Samaritan woman that everything she knows to be true about worship will change, not to mention verses 25 and 26 where he tells her that he is indeed the Messiah.
6. From a historical reading of this passage from John, we see Jesus is interacting with someone that he had learned from his faith was to be avoided. Can you think of examples of people or groups of people you do not have much to do with because of your faith or your social situation? What does this passage have to say to that?

As we prepare to move into the next part of our discussion, let us sing together:

SONG

"Beautiful Savior" *ELW* 838, *LBW* 518

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL READING

This is a story where God's grace breaks through to a woman who had not known much grace in her life. It comes in the context of some water and an interaction with a man, a stranger. It comes in the breaking of traditions.

There are different opinions in many faith communities about issues of worship. It can be as simple as a preference for piano over organ or vice versa, or the preferred Bible translation. It often is revealed in preferences for type of liturgy (we're assuming that liturgy is present in almost all kinds of worship, no matter how structured or how unstructured the worship experience is) and what kinds of songs or hymns are sung. (See "Meaning-Full Worship," p. 36.)

Let's read the story again, this time using the Bible paraphrase, *Message Remix*. This time we will just read the verses about worship, so read verses 23-26:

"It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people our Father is out looking for; those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration. The woman said, 'I don't know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we'll get the whole story.' 'I am he,' said Jesus. 'You don't have to wait any longer or look any further.'"

Using those verses and the invitation method of Bible study, divide into three groups, with each group assigned to one of the three paragraphs that follow:

In the ELCA statement on worship, "The Use of the Means of Grace," principle 4 states: "The gift of Word and Sacrament is from God. This statement on sacrament seeks to encourage unity among us

in the administration of the means of grace and to foster common understanding and practice. It does not seek to impose uniformity among us" (page 9 in the statement. Go to www.elca.org and search "The Use of the Means of Grace" to find the statement and resources.)

It further explains this principle in this way: "Our congregations receive and administer the means of grace in richly diverse ways. This diversity in practice is well grounded in the Confessions. 'It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies of human institution should be observed uniformly in all places.' (Augsburg Confession) We are united in one common center: Jesus Christ proclaimed in Word and sacraments amidst participating assemblies of singing, serving, and praying people."

Martin Luther writes in the Large Catechism about worship, "I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessing it possess. I was brought to it by the Holy Sprit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word, which is the first step in entering it. Before we had advanced this far, we were entirely of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community or Christian people. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word." (Large Catechism, Creed, par. 51-53)

From the *Christian Century's* Web site, in an article called "The Real Worship War" (2007), Mark Labberton writes: "What is ironic and especially pertinent is that many debates about worship

are just indirect ways of talking about ourselves not God. Our debates devolve into how we like our worship served up each week. It's worship as consumption rather than offering. It's an expression of human taste, not a longing to reflect God's glory. If we worship Jesus Christ, then we are to live like Jesus. In fact, Jesus says in Matthew 25:31-46 that our worship will be measured by how we have lived." (www.christianitytoday.com/le/2007/summer/7.81.html)

Discuss these comments in your group, keeping in mind what Jesus says in verses 23-26 (as historical information) and the paragraph you have to work with.

7. As you think about worship in the context of these writings, what do you think makes for "good" worship? What is vitally important for worship to be "good" worship?
8. If we think about worship as building up the community of believers and moving that community to service in the world, what are some of the main ideas for that in the Bible text and the paragraph?
9. What do the Bible text and the paragraph you read say about the differences of opinion about worship in your context?

Lutherans often talk about understanding Bible passages in terms of law (what convicts or holds me accountable) and gospel (what is the good news). In groups of two people, discuss one law idea and one gospel idea that you get from the reading in John 4:23-26, using either the *Message Remix* or the NRSV version of the Bible.

SONG

"Praise Ye the Lord, Alleluia" *ELW* 872

CLOSING

Come back together as a large group. We have spent this session thinking about worship and what it means, in the words of Jesus, "to worship in spirit and truth." It seems that Jesus brings a message that is not only new for the Samaritan woman but may be new for us also. Worshiping in spirit and truth can take many forms. Using the invitation method of discussion, let us end this session with a one/two word good news idea about worship.

10. What is one thing you tell a person new to your community about what worship means to you?

We end our session on worship with a song and a closing prayer.

SONG *(select one or both)*

"Great is Thy Faithfulness" *ELW 733, TFF 283, WOV 771*

"Gracious Spirit Hear Our Pleading" *ELW 401, TFF 103, WOV 687*

PRAYER

We pray together the words of Psalm 67:

May God be gracious to us and bless us.

May God's face shine up on us,

That your way may be known upon the earth,
your saving power among all nations.

Let the people praise you, O God, Let all the peoples praise you!

LOOKING AHEAD

The diversity of race and culture in the United States offer a glimpse of the wholeness and wonder of God. However, they often divide us as a people. It has been said that Sunday morning at 11 a.m. is the most segregated hour of the week because that is when we as Christians often worship. Our worshipping communities are often separate from each other, often by divisions of race and culture. As we study the story in the book of Acts about Peter and Cornelius, we will look at race and culture and how it interacts with faith. ☞

The Rev. Linda Johnson Seyenkulo, M.S., and the Rev. Jensen Seyenkulo, Ph.D., live in the Chicago area. Linda is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Park Forest, Ill., and Jensen is former director for rostered and authorized leadership in the ELCA Vocation and Education unit.



boldcafe.org

Read. Connect. Grow.

**Connect with the young women
in your life.**

Café is a free, monthly online magazine for young women offered by Women of the ELCA. Visit www.boldcafe.org and subscribe to receive e-mail alerts for new issues. Also available as a podcast.

Women of the **ELCA**



MEANINGFUL

Full
WORSHIP

by Susan Greeley

At its best, worship is a transcendent experience for those who participate.

For a brief moment in time we are lifted out of our everyday reality and into the presence of God. We are awed by God's power and overwhelmed by the love and grace that surround us.

If you have ever attended the opening worship at a Triennial Gathering or a Churchwide Assembly you know what I mean. Professional liturgists have spent months planning the details of those worship services. The opening processional is majestic. The

best musicians are featured and the preaching is excellent. The service may include liturgical dance or multicultural music that is new to you. And to all these wonderful elements of worship, add hundreds of the faithful people and you have the potential for a true mountaintop experience. The evaluation forms gathered after major ELCA events often cite the worship services as a highlight for participants.

But then what?

We leave the mountaintop and

go back down to the plains, complete with the "plain" worship at our local congregation. Like the disciples who witnessed the Transfiguration, we are not allowed to remain on the mountain for long. So now where do we find the transcendent? What is it that truly makes for meaningful worship?

Before I venture any further let me add this disclaimer: I am no liturgist, nor am I theologically trained. I am a lay person who has had the privilege of attending



broad spectrum of worship services. I have learned that the answer to “What makes worship meaningful?” is subjective. You may have struggled with this in your own congregation, perhaps deciding to offer both a “contemporary” and a “traditional” worship service. So consider this to be just one person’s reflection on what makes for worship in spirit and in truth.

When I think back on the worship services that I have found most meaningful, I find the metaphor of

geography to be helpful. And while I have reveled in the mountaintop worship experiences, I have found just as much meaning down in the meadow.

The meadow

I like to think of the worship services at my home congregation as taking place in a meadow. This is a comforting place where I know the ground well. I know where the sweet grass lies and where the rocky crags can trip me up. When

I’m thirsty, I know where the crystal waters of the stream run. The rest of the flock is as familiar as family. I know the voice of our shepherd and I trust her. Is worship in this setting always, or even usually, a mountaintop experience? Honestly, no. But is it meaningful? Absolutely.

In many ways it’s more meaningful than the pomp of the mountaintop worship service. These are people who know me well—and still accept me. These are the people I

turn to when I need help or encouragement or a good laugh. It isn't grand and glorious, but it is good and godly and very meaningful.

The desert

There are times when worship seems like an arid desert. It doesn't matter how profound the sermon might be or how inspiring the music. Nothing sits right with my soul. The babbling child that would normally delight me is now irritating beyond belief. My mind wanders during the sermon and I suddenly realize I'm making out the grocery list. I go through the motions of the Eucharist, trusting that God will forgive my ennui, along with the rest of my sins.

Do I find worship meaningful during these desert times? With a soul this parched it's hard to find meaning in much of anything. It's only later, when I come to the end of this desert that I can look back and recognize worship for the oasis that it was. Traveling through life's deserts is not enjoyable, but there is meaning to be found if we keep coming to the oases of worship.

The valley of the shadow of death

The loss of a spouse. A terminal diagnosis. The estrangement of a child or dear friend. Who can anticipate the depth of grief that life can bring? I will always remember former Presiding Bishop H. George Anderson speaking about what wor-

ship meant to him after the death of his wife. He was too numb with grief to sing or pray, but he kept coming to worship anyway. Why? Because he said it was at that time that the congregation sang on his behalf. They prayed on his behalf. They did liturgy ("the work of the people") as they worshipped—on his behalf. They carried him through that valley of the shadow of death until he was able to walk again on his own.

This is the kind of blessing that is lost to the person who says "I commune with God alone in nature." Of course, it's possible to experience the Divine in solitude, in creation and the beauty of the natural world. But humans were made for community; corporate worship provides the steadfastness that isn't swayed by an individual's emotion or outward circumstances.

Unknown territory

Sometimes we find ourselves in a worship service that is as far away as we can imagine from the comfort of our own meadow. Maybe it's the contemporary service with the rock band that plays unfamiliar songs. Perhaps we once attended a non-liturgical church where the service felt more like performance than worship. Maybe you visit a church where the congregants are more emotional and outspoken than people would be at a typical

Lutheran congregation. Or maybe it's a church of a different denomination where the service itself is unfamiliar.

Once when I invited a non-Lutheran friend to worship, she said, "I'll go if there isn't a lot of standing up and sitting down." She missed out on a beautiful Christmas Eve worship experience, just because of her fear of the unknown.

Most people feel uncomfortable in unfamiliar territory and that can make worship difficult—if we let it. But if we approach every worship service with an open spirit, an eagerness to learn, and a faith in one true God, we may be pleasantly surprised at the meaning we will find there. I have attended formal worship services with incense and informal services that ended with an altar call. Finding a worship style that suits us is a legitimate matter of preference; finding meaning in worship is a matter of being open to the Spirit.

Stranger in a strange land

One of the most memorable and meaningful worship services I ever attended was one in which I understood absolutely nothing of what was said.

In 1995, I attended Sunday morning worship at a Lutheran congregation in Bratislava, Slovakia. The service was entirely in Slovak, which I do not speak or under-

stand. I spent the sermon admiring the ancient architecture and the ornately carved wooden pulpit that rose a full story above the pews. Nearly all of the pews were empty, save for a few, very old worshippers, mostly women. Decades of Communist rule had taken a toll on the congregation.

I remember thinking then that the Roman Catholic Church might have had good reason to conduct the mass in Latin. At least everyone was able to understand the liturgy, no matter where they worshipped. Suddenly, about three-quarters of the way through the service, meaning broke through and I was completely engaged again in worship. Why? Because the pastor began the Eucharist and I was enfolded in a ritual so profound that it needed no words. When the community began reciting the Lord's Prayer in Slovak I recognized it immediately.

I understood nothing of the language, but everything of the meaning. No longer was I a stranger in a strange land. I had been welcomed home through worship.

The right question

Given the geography of worship, is it possible that we're asking the wrong question when we ask, What makes worship meaningful? That question carries with it an implied phrase: What makes worship meaningful *to me*? But what if the ques-

tion we ought to be asking is, What makes worship meaningful *to God*? How would our response change?

No one can presume to know what makes worship meaningful to God. We know from Scripture that all acts of worship are not acceptable. Think of the story of Cain and Abel.

"Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard" (Genesis 4:2-5).

Genesis doesn't tell us why the Lord was unhappy with Abel's sacrifice, but the book of Hebrews offers one explanation:

"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's" (Hebrews 11:4).

If Abel's faith was the deciding factor for God, perhaps finding personal satisfaction and meaning in worship is less important than the attitude with which we come before God. If we aren't careful, centering our worship life around *us* can result in little more than idolatry.

By practicing a faith that seeks to worship in a way that God would find meaningful, perhaps we will be forced to expand our very idea

of worship. According to Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, worship is far more than a time-bound, weekly ritual.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

Here is the same passage from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson:

"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him."

Once our bodies become a living sacrifice, an offering, our entire lives become an act of worship. We realize that the question we are really asking is this: What makes life meaningful?

For me, the answer to both questions is the same. What makes both worship and life meaningful is a relationship with God. ☸

Susan Greeley lives in Oak Park, Ill., and worships at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. She works as the director of development for the annual fund of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.

Race and Culture

by Linda Johnson Seyenkulo and Jensen Seyenkulo

WORSHIP RESOURCES

ELW Evangelical Lutheran Worship (*also known as the red book*)

LBW Lutheran Book of Worship (*also known as the green book*)

WOV With One Voice (*also known as the blue book*)

TFF This Far By Faith (*also known as the African American hymnal*)

LLC Libro de Liturgia y Cántico (*also known as the Latino hymnal*)

W&P Worship and Praise (*also known as the contemporary hymnal*)

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Amos 3:3 (KJV)

THEME VERSE

"Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'" Acts 10:34–35

MAIN TEXT

Acts 10:1–36

OPENING

See devotional reading on page 41.

Guidelines and Discussion Method for our Time Together

To facilitate our Bible study discussion, we are going to adapt the rules for engagement and the invitation method of discussion, both of which are printed in the September 2010 issue and are available online at www.lutheranwomantoday.org. At the start of each session, we ask that you refresh your memory of these two vital tools. Adhering to them—especially when more sensitive topic areas come into play—helps to assure that productive discussions can respectfully take place, leading to growth and greater appreciation for all who are members of the body of Christ.

INTRODUCTION

When the ELCA was formed 21 years ago, the church made a decision to work toward a membership that included 10 percent people of color. Two decades later, we find the church still at a level of about 3 percent. And we continue to ask, "Why have we not been able to reach the goal we set for ourselves?"

In this session, we are going to look at the intersection of race, culture, and faith. Many of us no longer live in neighborhoods made up only of people who look and dress and act like us. This is not just happening in urban or inner city areas; even the most rural parts of our nation have a more diverse population today. At issue, then, is that our churches, including ELCA congregations, fail to reflect the diversity of our communities.

Some might say, "Well, they probably go to a different church." We might want to ask who "they" are. The reality is that all of our communities have a large number of people who do not go to any church. Reaching across racial and cultural lines to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in an authentic way is part of what we are called to do as Christians.

OVERVIEW

God's people come from a variety of ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. God's wonderful diversity is a gift to God's people. That diversity enriches

he church and shows us a wider reality of the image of God. It also brings out the way in which power and privilege (and the lack of it) affect our relationships with each other in the body of Christ. In this section, we explore the gift and the challenge of diversity in race and culture.

DEVOTIONAL READING

For this session we are going to use the SPECK method for devotional reading. This is a devotional reading of the Bible passage that is very personal and asks questions that apply to you individually.

Listen to Amos 3:3 and then to Acts 10:34–35. Sit silently with a piece of paper and answer the following questions for yourself.

Here are the questions:

1. Is there a SIN for me to avoid?
2. Is there a PROMISE from God for me to claim?
3. Is there an EXAMPLE for me to follow?
4. Is there a COMMANDMENT for me to obey?
5. How can this passage increase my KNOWLEDGE about God or about Jesus Christ?

These questions and answers are just for you. Try this at home sometime with another Bible passage.

SONG (select one)

"Will You Come and Follow Me" *ELW* 798, *W&P* 13
"For All the Saints" *LBW* 174
"I'm so Glad Jesus Lifted Me" *ELW* 860, *TFF* 191, *VOV* 673

PRAYER

A Four Directions Prayers of the People

Praying to the four directions is common in many cultures. Here we face the four directions and pray for the people from all the different directions.

LEADER: There are gifts from each of the peoples in the four directions of the world. The winds of the different directions remind us of these gifts. We invite participants to stand and face the four directions, honoring the wholeness of humanity and God's creation. Let us turn now to the east. We give thanks for the peoples of the east. This direction symbolizes new life on the earth and reminds us of our connectedness to each other and to creation. The sun rises in the east and each day is a gift. Life itself is a gift.

ALL: Come Holy Spirit, come.

LEADER: And we offer our prayers for God's church: May God open our eyes each morning to the gift of God's reconciliation with us through Jesus, and the call to be ministers of reconciliation. We pray for our leaders and for renewal for all who nurture the church in Christ's ministry of healing and transforming the world. We turn to face south. We give thanks for the peoples of the south. The south represents warmth and growth. Give us your strength and courage to be open to new learning and to grow in our witness and care for the world, we pray.

ALL: Come Holy Spirit, come.

LEADER: And we offer our prayers for God's world, praying especially for those who suffer from the violence of racism, poverty and war; and from the legacies of colonialism and slavery. May God's strength be with all who suffer and with all who work for justice, peace, and the healing of relationships amongst peoples. We turn to face west. We give thanks for the peoples of the

west. The west represents the gift of rest, the passing of time and of those who have gone before. Give us the wisdom and grace to use your gifts of time and leisure well; give comfort to those who mourn, and rest to those who have passed into your care, we pray.

ALL: Come Holy Spirit, come.

LEADER: And we offer our prayers for all in need: May God's peace and healing presence be with all who suffer and those who are weary and in need of rest. We turn to face north. We give thanks for the peoples of the north. A gift of this direction is clarity of vision and a sense of the strength we need to live each day. Help us to see more clearly your role for us, especially in the healing and care of mother earth, we pray.

ALL: Come Holy Spirit, come.

LEADER: And we offer our prayers for the wisdom of discernment: May God open our hearts to the grace of God's holy presence with us and around us, that we might truly behold the earth and each other as beloved by God. We turn to complete the circle and to look: to God who cleanses our earth with snow, wind, fire and rain; to Jesus Christ who fills us with the wideness of mercy and lovingly embraces us all, and to the Holy Spirit who inspires us.

ALL: Amen*

GATHERING TIME

We are going to get right into the study of the word on this important topic of race and culture. There will be time to share as you experience the Bible passage and learn about race and culture. Here are the three definitions† we used while writing on race and culture.

Race, as this study is being written, is defined as a construct (an arbitrary classification) of modern humans, sometimes . . . based on any or a combination of various physical characteristics such as skin

color, facial form, or eye shape, and now frequently based on such genetic markers as blood groups.

Culture is defined as the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group; in anthropology, the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.

Power is ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something and the possession of control or command over others; authority, ascendancy and delegated authority; authority granted to a person or people in a particular office or capacity.

HISTORICAL READING

Our story is from the book of Acts. It is the story of the Christian church after the resurrection of Jesus. It continues the story of the apostles and disciples of Jesus and their travels to proclaim this good news. It is a story for our time as the followers of Jesus run smack up against the differing cultures, customs, prejudices, and racial and ethnic realities of the world at that time. The followers of Jesus were primarily Jewish Christians, people raised in one religious tradition, with certain boundaries and ideas about others. They were called by God into relationship with and to witness to people from other ethnic and religious backgrounds who also heard the call of Jesus.

It is evident that this was difficult. In Acts 10:44–48 the Holy Spirit comes on a group of Gentile folks Peter was speaking to and says, “the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.” In other words, Peter and company are thinking, “Can you believe it? Even the Gentiles, with the way they live and worship, can receive God's spirit and live in God's wholeness.”

While most of us would not be so blunt as to let others know we think that way, the fact remains when we are faced with differences of race and culture, we may have those thoughts. It may show in our actions or the way we welcome or interact with others. (See "Cultural Iceberg," p. 16.)

The book of Acts tells the story of those challenges and how God's Spirit continued to open up new ministry opportunities everywhere the disciples went. We are going to look at the story of Peter and Cornelius. As you read the Bible story think about it as five stories held together.

This story gets at the heart of how social, racial, and cultural customs and laws can present challenges to God's people who are trying to do God's will and work in the world.

Historical and social context

The Jews lived under the military oppression of the Romans. Cornelius was a soldier in the prestigious Italian cohort of the Roman army. Peter was Jewish and one of the original 12 disciples of Jesus. Neither one of these men would have had much to do with each other.

Think how far apart the lives of these two men were. Cornelius was a member of the oppressor group; he had military power and strength. Even while being a member of the Roman occupation of Israel, he was a religious man. Peter on the other hand was Jewish, a member of the group of people whose land was occupied by the Roman army. Peter was a Jewish Christian, followed and believed in Jesus but still followed the Jewish laws of faithful living.

Romans lived differently than Jews did. Jews and Jewish Christians believed that the Roman way of living was unclean. In addition, the power Romans had over Jews and Jewish Christians made any kind of real relationship very difficult. The interaction between Peter and Cornelius was full of

all kinds of power and race and culture dynamics, which made God's request of both of them pretty counter-cultural. (See "Breaking the Rules," p. 26.)

Read these passages:

Acts 10:1-8 Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian cohort (part of the army of the Roman oppressors) has a vision.

Acts 10:9-16 Peter, Jewish disciple of Jesus, has a vision

Acts 10:17-23 Cornelius' men come to Peter's house

Acts 10:24-36 Cornelius and Peter meet at Cornelius' house

Acts 10:44-48 Peter baptizes the Gentiles who are with Cornelius

6. We have rules (written or unwritten) that frame how we interact with people. What were some of the social, cultural, and class rules that were at work in the lives of Peter and Cornelius in the verses you have?
7. What did the main person in these verses have to put aside in order to do what God was asking him to do?
8. If you were called like Peter or Cornelius what would be a difficult racial/cultural barrier for you to cross?

LITERARY READING

The story of Peter and Cornelius is the story of two men who had visions or dreams or ecstatic trances, depending on the Greek or Hebrew word used. Visions and dreams were a common occurrence in that time. They were thought to offer some direction from God about what would or should happen in life. In Bible times, dreams were considered real and could move people to action they might not normally have considered. The Bible is full of stories of people who had visions or dreams. These dreams gave them guidance.

ACTIVITY

Formula for a Dream Story

The person dreams or has a vision or an ecstatic trance (depends on the Greek or Hebrew word that is used in the story).

The dream/vision/trance consists of God's voice or some visual experience combined with God's voice that tells the person to do something or to understand some future or larger purpose for their life. Often it would seem very strange to them.

The person is changed by the dream/vision/trance and moves out to act on what they have been told or seen.

9. What are some dream stories you remember from the Bible? The story of Peter and Cornelius is one of the visions and/or dreams and/or ecstatic trances that brought God's call for them.
10. What does this story have in common with the other dream stories that you brought up? How is it different?

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL READING

As we think about race and culture from a biblical perspective, our reading about Peter and Cornelius can be enriched and shaped by what other dreamers or visionaries have said about the ways that cultural rules and our understanding about race can be shaped or understood in a different way. We can see that Peter and Cornelius moved across cultural, religious, and maybe even racial boundaries so God's kingdom could be welcoming to all of God's people.

Here are the voices of one teacher, one preacher and a civil rights leader, and the main character from a popular movie. Each of them speaks a vision or a dream that may be different from the dominant views about race and culture and how we live together as people of God. Some 2,000 years ago,

Peter and Cornelius found a way to move beyond what they knew. Here are some voices closer to our time that may help us understand some of what they were experiencing.

Allan Johnson

Allan Johnson, a self-described "white, male, heterosexual, non-disabled, middle-class professional" in his book *Privilege, Power, and Difference* speaks about diversity in this way, "The trouble around diversity, then, isn't just that people differ from one another. The trouble is produced by a world organized in ways that encourage people to use difference to include or exclude, reward or punish, credit or discredit, elevate or oppress, value or devalue, leave alone or harass."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

This famous speech comes from Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered at the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963: "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. . . . I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character . . . little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers."

Neo

"The Matrix" is a science-fiction movie whose title refers to the system of how everything works together, which may be real or unreal. Neo, the main character, speaks these words in the closing scene after he has managed to break free: "I know you're out there. I can feel you now. I know that you're afraid. You're afraid of us. You're afraid of

change. I don't know the future. I didn't come here to tell you how this is going to end. I came here to tell you how it's going to begin. I'm going to hang up this phone and then I'm going to show these people what you don't want them to see. I'm going to show them the world . . . without borders or boundaries, a world where anything is possible. Where we go from there is a choice I leave to you."

The three quotes above speak about some different realities of difference.

11. What does this dream/vision have to say to you in your church community, and in your own life? What questions does this dream/vision raise in your mind and heart? What surprises you about this dream/vision?

DIGGING DEEPER

These are suggestions to follow up with at another time if you are interested in learning more about race and culture:

Check to see if your synodical women's organization or synod has an anti-racism team and find out what they are doing.

Check out one of these movies:

The Matrix—A group of people are pulled out of what they know to be true to experience something different.

A Day Without a Mexican—This movie documents a fictitious day in the United States where all the Mexicans living and working in one particular area, vanish.

Spanglish—This entertaining movie has some great messages about what is of value and what makes a person who they are.

The Great Debaters—The inspiring story of an African American high school debate team.

Read about the Women of the ELCA anti-racism program and cross-cultural education on p. 19.

CLOSING

The story of Peter and Cornelius is a story from the start of our Christian faith. It is a story that continues to connect with us because issues of race and culture continue to be challenges for the church and for the world.

What is one thing you learned from the story of Peter and Cornelius and/or the voices from now or the recent past that you are going to take home and continue to think about? How will it change your way of living in the world?

PRAYER

Creator God, who formed all humans in your image, we gather as your people to worship, and as we gather, we celebrate the breadth of diversity of human creation. Open our eyes to see the amazing wonder of you in each and everyone we meet. Bless your church with the spirit of inclusion and love for all of God's people. It is in the name of Jesus Christ your Son, who came bringing faith, hope, and love, that we pray. Amen*.

SONG (select one)

"We Shall Overcome" *TFF* 213

"Un Pueblo que Camina" *LLC* 520

"We are Called" *ELW* 720

LOOKING AHEAD

Loving relationships is our topic for next month. Come and join in the discussion about how our differences in controversial topics can keep us from loving each other the way Jesus calls us to love. We'll see if we can come up with some ways to stay in conversation and relationship, even though we do not agree. 🌿

The Rev. Linda Johnson Seyenkulo, M.S., and **the Rev. Jensen Seyenkulo, Ph.D.,** live in the Chicago area. Linda is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Park Forest, Ill., and Jensen is former director for rostered and authorized leadership in the ELCA Vocation and Education unit.

Human Sexuality: *Gift and Trust* by Roger A. Willer

INTRODUCTION

A DISTINCTLY LUTHERAN APPROACH

- ☞ Justified by grace through faith
- ☞ Christian freedom in service of the neighbor
- ☞ God's continuing creation
- ☞ God's law at work in the world
- ☞ The Ten Commandments
- ☞ Our vocation to serve the neighbor
- ☞ Lutheran social ethics

TRUST AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

- ☞ The complexity of human sexuality
- ☞ Social trust and the common good
- ☞ Human sexuality and our calling to establish trust

SEXUALITY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES THAT ENHANCE SOCIAL TRUST

- ☞ Marriage: shelter and context for trust
- ☞ Lifelong monogamous same-gender relationships
- ☞ Loving families: ground and source for social trust
- ☞ Protecting children & youth in & for trusting relationships

SEXUALITY AND TRUST IN RELATIONSHIPS

- ☞ Sexuality and self
- ☞ Gender and friendships
- ☞ Commitment and sexuality
- ☞ Sexual intimacy and adult cohabitation

SEXUALITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- ☞ Sexuality and society
- ☞ Sexuality and public ministry
- ☞ Sexuality in the workplace

CONCLUSION

- ☞ Human sexuality and moral discernment
- ☞ The necessity of mercy, always

The statement can be downloaded for free from www.elca.org/social statements in English or Spanish. A complimentary printed copy can be requested by calling 800-638-3522; multiple copies can be ordered there for a small fee as well (ITEM001504).

If there is one ELCA social statement that would seem to need no introduction, it is *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. The 2009 Church-wide Assembly floor debate about homosexuality—which was actually more related to decisions about ministry policies—generated great

media attention, and its adoption has resulted in much anguish for some and hope for others.

All this attention does not mean people actually know what is in the statement! It remains widely believed that the statement is primarily about same-gender relation-

ships. In fact, that issue is treated in only one section out of 23. So, it is important to ask some key questions while introducing the content of this broad-ranging statement.

First, we should ask, what do those other 22 sections cover? A quick look at the outline provide

clue. Marriage is central, but the text also treats sexuality and family, children, divorce, the self, friendship, and sex outside marriage. It covers social issues such as the global sex-trade, the commercialization of sex, internet sex, sexual abuse, clergy misconduct, sexually transmitted diseases, sexuality and the workplace, and more.

Why so much?

The statement informs us that human sexuality is deeply relational and grows out of the web of family ties and social interaction (p. 27)*. It also reports that individual sexuality is shaped by cultural forces and practices. Economics, business and advertising, social roles, medicine and science, and entertainment—these all are relevant to sexuality (p. 26).

God creates human beings as sexual creatures. Sexuality is a marvelous and awesome gift (p. 4) given through a rich and diverse combination of physical, emotional, and relational interactions (p. 28), all of which receive some attention in the statement. Sexuality also is a trust that brings great joy and delight but can be used sinfully to cause great harm. The broad reach of the statement is necessary to address

the many places that sexuality intersects with human life.

In addition to identifying sexuality's goodness and its potential for harm, the statement addresses other key themes. Its theological framework is provided by Jesus' invitation to love God and love our neighbor (Romans 13:9–10; Galatians 5:14). Its moral guidance is situated within a Lutheran emphasis on our Christian freedom through the gospel to serve our neighbor (p. 3).

Trust and harm

Central to our vocation of serving the neighbor is building and protecting trust in human relationships and in social institutions. In accord with Scripture, the statement pinpoints trust as a fundamental character of right relationship. In response to God's faithful (trustworthy) relationship of love through Christ for the world, we are to seek to be trustworthy in our human sexuality and to build social institutions and practices where trust and trustworthy relationships can thrive (p. 5).

These emphases on *building trust and preventing harm* provide the way to assess how social practices and social arrangements treat sexuality. The question is: Do social

practices and structures (such as business practices and economic systems) shelter, sustain, and protect personal, familial, and social trusting relationships? Do they help individuals to flourish? Or do these social forces harm physical, emotional, and social relationships? The

The ELCA is united in opposing all forms of violence or discrimination and is committed to welcoming all people, regardless of sexual orientation, and their families into our congregations.

statement teaches that it is part of the church's calling to speak to these issues, as individual Christians and as an institution in society (p. 33).

How are the themes of building trust and preventing harm reflected in some of the most discussed issues in our culture today—issues such as the nature of marriage? The statement describes marriage as “a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope authorized legally

by the state and blessed by God. The historic Christian tradition and the Lutheran Confessions have recognized marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman, reflecting Mark 10:6–9” (p. 15). It goes on to say that marriage is intended to protect the creation and nurturing of mutual trust and love as one foundation of human community: “It is a binding relationship that provides conditions for personal well-being, the flourishing of the partner, and the possibility of procreation and the nurturing of children. It is also intended to be a blessing to the community and the world” (p. 16).

The role of family

The same themes of trust and harm appear in its discussion of family. The family is a primary place of trust-building precisely because of the remarkable level of commitment and care that characterizes familial bonds. “While Scripture places family as secondary to the community of God’s people (Matthew 10:37; 12:49), it also attests to the family’s foundational role in protecting and nurturing human community (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1–4)” (p. 21).

The statement notes that children learn either trust or distrust from their earliest relationships with parents and others in the household. Those who do not learn to

trust face significant obstacles to becoming trustworthy individuals. They also may find that it is difficult to develop a mature and healthy sexuality. For these reasons, “This church regards the family as an indispensable social institution because of its role in establishing conditions of trust and protection of the vulnerable” (p. 22).

Love and respect

It is important to stress—as the statement does—that the ELCA is united in opposing all forms of violence or discrimination and is committed to welcoming all people, regardless of sexual orientation, and their families into our congregations (p. 18). It states clearly that casual or promiscuous relationships between same-gender individuals—as well as heterosexuals—are opposed. The sole matter of whether or how to regard *lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships* is where the statement recognizes different positions among ELCA members.

In response, the statement draws on the foundational Lutheran understanding that the baptized are called to love our neighbor. We also are asked to respect the neighbor, including the neighbor whose convictions depend on a different understanding of Scripture than we might hold (bound conscience). The statement does not prescribe “believe what you want” but establishes boundar-

ies by clarifying four principled and broadly representative positions that have emerged within our church after years of study, prayer, dialogue, and scholarship. Each position has a strong rationale regarding Scripture and theological heritage as well as the meaning of scientific data and appropriate practice in pastoral care (p. 20).

With these in place, the statement concludes: “We understand that, in this discernment about ethics and church practice, faithful people can and will come to different conclusions about the meaning of Scripture and about what constitutes responsible action. We further believe that this church, on the basis of ‘the bound conscience,’ will include these different understandings and practices within its life as it seeks to live out its mission and ministry in the world.”

While this introduction to *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* can touch on a few of the most important questions regarding sexuality, there is so much more! The complex questions raised by our culture call for a wide-ranging statement that provides guidance for discerning what it means to be faithful to God and to love the neighbor. Bring your own questions to the text and find out what is there. ☞

The Rev. Dr. Roger A. Willer is director of the department for studies in ELCA Church in Society.



GRACE NOTES

Whole Lot of Bold

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



Bold Women's Day is February 27.

For ways to observe Bold Women's

Day, both as individuals and as a

group, visit www.womenoftheelca.org.

or call 800-638-3522 to

receive a tip sheet.

Next month we join in celebrating our fifth Bold Women's Day. Observed this year on February 27, Bold Women's Day offers women across this church the opportunity to explore the many ways women act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ (from our mission statement). We can find a whole lot of bold in this church, and we are recognizing all its shapes and sizes.

The stories of many bold women grace regularly this magazine. In this issue you've encountered our two featured speakers at the 2011 Triennial Gathering, bold women in their own right. In "Speaking Out," (p. 12) author Jodi Deike introduces Leymah Gbowee, who boldly gathered together Christian and Muslim women in war-torn Liberia, women who had enough of death, destruction, rape, and physical violence. This Lutheran woman led an effort that ultimately brought peace to Liberia.

In "Scotch Tape and Baling Wire," (p. 22) author Nora Gallagher shares an excerpt from her latest book. In this moving account of how the body of Christ is stitched together in Holy Communion, Gallagher shows a vulnerable but powerful side of bold. Anxiety and helplessness accompanied Gallagher one Christmas Eve when she was called to help distribute Holy Communion. The 12-year-old daughter of a friend was lost in a plane crash. Gallagher learned anew of the community of God and shares her lessons in her book, *The Sacred Meal*.

Both women will hold book signings at the Eighth Triennial Gathering:

Renew, Respond, Rejoice! They are just two of the many bold women you will encounter there. Bold women will surround you as you sit (or dance!) in plenary sessions, as you eat a meal in the food court, as you learn from exhibitors in Camp Dianoigo (dee-an-'oy-go).

I hope you'll join me in Spokane, July 14-17, 2011. If you're not able to travel to the gathering this year, draw deep into the well of your bold and see how you might be able to participate in another way. Perhaps you and the women of your congregational unit could pool your money and send a younger woman from your congregation to the gathering, helping to develop her bold. Perhaps you could knit or crochet a prayer shawl (or two) and contribute them to the prayer shawl collection that will benefit people served by ministries in our host synod, the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod. Perhaps you could participate in the quilt challenge, interpreting the gathering theme. Why not plan a run, walk and roll in your community to raise funds for our health initiative? You could schedule it for Saturday morning, when women in Spokane will be doing the same thing.

As always, you are invited to hold the event and participants in prayer. While we pause once a year on Bold Women's Day to celebrate the bold in each of us, let us remember we are called to act boldly on our faith in Jesus Christ each and every day. What does bold look like for you today? 🌿

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

A Wide-open Embrace

by Catherine Malotky

God, many promise us solutions. Advertising assures us through images and headlines that if we use this or that product, our problem will be solved. Who knew this problem was so intractable until it was named for us? And who knew there was such an easy way out?

Not that advertising is bad. Advertisers know we yearn for better lives, to be better loved, better admired, better respected. Of course. Life is complicated. Relationships are complicated. Community is complicated. This is simply true.

And we would all be happy for easy solutions, whether it's our own weight loss or the ins and outs of congregational life. Isn't that the seduction of believing you never change, God? Defining you as unchangeable is a comfort in our world of change. But how can we possibly know who you are in the first place? You are so much greater, so far beyond the capacity of our imaginations. We have Jesus, and in him we see you the clearest, but even Jesus is not the whole of who you are.

You are still greater, still more, still beyond. And we humans are still limited by our imaginations, by time and space, and by our own mortality. In our efforts to be faithful, we seek to discern and do your will. And out of this holy instinct to be responsive to you, we start focusing more on how to please you than how to be the ones you have created. Too quickly we turn to rules to help us, and too quickly those rules start working against us.

Rules, as helpful as they are in assisting us to make sense of our world and our place in it, inevitably exclude, judge, discourage, and limit our imagination. Frankly, God, I'll bet you don't need us to be fawning all over you. You don't need our affirmation or our praise. You don't need certain kinds of music or certain words or certain gestures when we worship. *You* don't need anything.

We do.

We need to say thank you. We need to feel included. We need to offer up our intercessions because we need to, not so you'll listen. In Jesus, we know the door is wide open. So our challenge, as we imagine our way into the future, is how to worship and interact in ways that welcome others to this wide-open embrace of yours. You have declared in Jesus that all people have value to you. How will we be respectful of each other as we come together? How many worship languages can we speak, whether music or words, or movement, or space? How many can we welcome, not to become like us, but to teach us more about you? How many imaginations by exposing us to the diversity of ways it's manifested?

Oh, God. Make your wide-open embrace obvious to us. Give us the eyes to see all within it, so that we might welcome what you offer, and have the courage to engage when it is hard to make sense of it all. In Jesus' name. Amen. ✠

The Rev. Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been a book editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.



Renew, Respond, Rejoice!

Revitalize Yourself and Celebrate Your Faith

Eighth Triennial Gathering
July 14–17, 2011 • Spokane, Wash.

Register Today!

www.womenoftheelca.org/triennial1
For information, call 1-800-638-3522 ext. 2730

- **Connect with your Lutheran sisters** in this life-changing women's event.
- **Renew your spirit** in enriching workshops, worship services, Bible studies and more!
- **Strengthen intergenerational connections** as The Rev. Susan Briehl and her daughter present a faith-building workshop.

Women ^{of the} **ELCA**

Early bird discount
ends Jan. 7!



LWT Editorial Office

For editorial feedback, magazine promotion questions, article suggestions, or advertising inquiries write or e-mail:

LWT Editorial Office
Women of the ELCA
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631-4189

800-638-3522

lwt@elca.org www.lutheranwomantoday.org

Bible Study Resource Orders

Bible Study Leader Guides, Companion Bibles, etc.

800-328-4648 www.augsburgfortress.org

Visit our Blogs

<http://blogs.elca.org/lwtmagazine>

<http://blogs.elca.org/women>

Bible Study Videos

www.lutheranwomantoday.org/biblestudy

DIRECTORY OF READER SERVICES

SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE

Change of address, renewals, questions about your subscription, and new subscription orders must be addressed to our subscription order center at Augsburg Fortress. 1 year/10 issues \$12

800-328-4648

LWT Subscription Order Center
Box 1553

Minneapolis, MN 55440-8730

subscriptions@augburgfortress.org

Audiotape edition

800-328-4648

Permission to reprint articles

800-421-0239

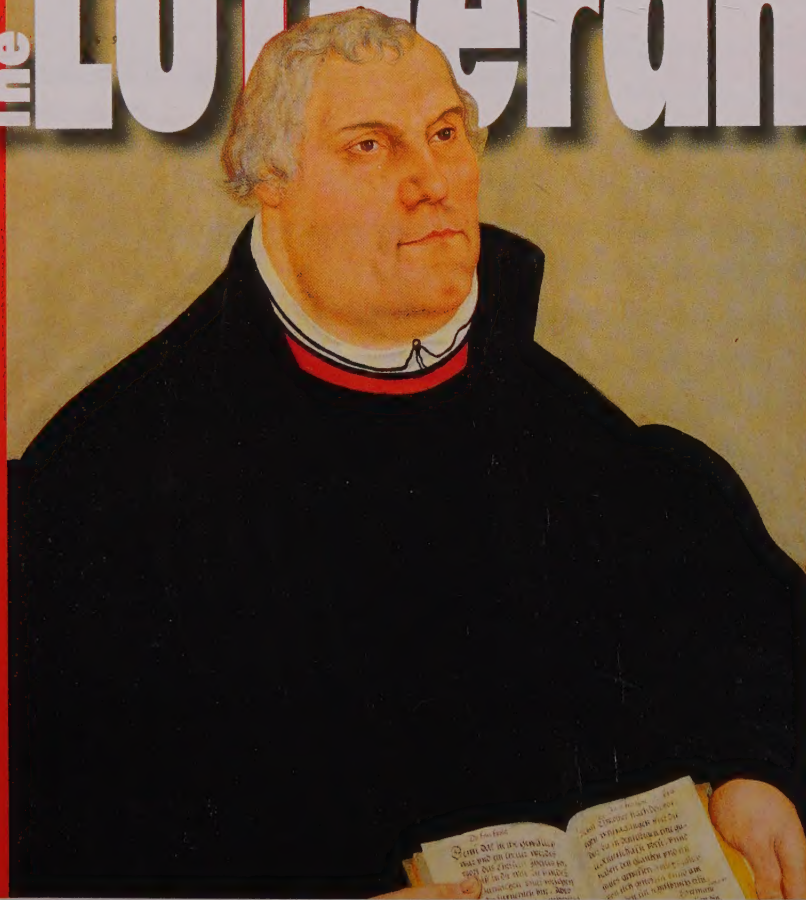
copyright@augburgfortress.org

Stir the spirit within! Go to www.boldcafe.org.

|||||
#BXNRXWW *****CR LOT 0066A**C-037
#81000056489# 1000000547 LW1286
GRADUATE THEOL UNION MAR11 375
2400 RIDGE RD
LIBRARY-SERIALS DEPT P000368 430
BERKELEY CA 94709-1212

Please direct all changes of address to Augsburg Fortress, Publishers (see Reader Services).

The Lutheran



The place where you will find Lutheran news and views on life, faith, scripture, congregational mission and more. It is a resource for education, outreach and evangelism while providing an open discussion forum on tough issues of the day. \$7.95 for qualifying group subscriptions, \$17.95 for an individual subscription.

For information about subscription plans, call 1-800-328-4648, #1 or www.thelutheran.org

WWW.THELUTHERAN.ORG

- ☐ Weekly e-mail newsletter
- ☐ Web subscriptions available
- ☐ Downloadable study guides and content



Nurturing faith



Early childhood educators like *The Little*

Lutheran. Cheryl Stearns, director of children's ministries, Shepherd of the Valley, Apple Valley, Minn., says, "Finally, a wonderful, developmentally appropriate, Lutheran resource for early childhood. ... A great blend of stories, Psalms, songs and activities. The photography and brightly colored graphics are superb."

Visit www.thelittlelutheran.org or call 800-328-4648 to order. **Order six or more for \$12.95 per subscription.**

- nursery or preschool classes
- Sunday school or vacation Bible school
- baptismal gifts/anniversaries
- worship bags
- gifts for visitors
- cradle roll mailings
- children's sermon resource